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RATS IN THE SACRISTY

RATS IN THE SACRISTY

BY
LLEWELYN POWYS

*With fourteen wood engravings
by Gertrude M. Powys*

Essay Index Reprint Series

BOOKS FOR LIBRARIES PRESS, INC.
FREEPORT, NEW YORK

First published 1937

Reprinted 1967



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG NUMBER:

67-30226

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Allow the ear to hear what it likes, the eye to see what it likes, the nose to smell what it likes, the mouth to say what it likes, the body to enjoy what it likes, and the mind to do what it likes.—YANG CHU.

DEDICATED
TO
GEORGE SANTAYANA

PREFACE

INFORMAL and casual appreciation of great historic and legendary figures can often be, in the hands of a kindred spirit, more illuminating than the most exhaustive and erudite interpretations. Such I feel is especially true of these lively and characteristic essays of my brother.

A man of letters is known by the intellectual company he keeps; and it interests me to trace the occult affinities between these very different guests of my brother's mind, answering as they must do, for all their diversity, certain deep spontaneous demands in so devoted an adherent.

Is it possible, among such a gathering of great ones, in this very personal and private Elysian Field, to catch at some quality shared by all, which, like the brand on the back of a goodly flock, marks them as belonging to the same fold? This quality can hardly be what Nietzsche calls the "Dionysian," as against the "Apollonian," for any great teacher less "Dionysian" than Confucius could hardly be found.

But what could, I think, be said of them all is that they bring down divine philosophy to the earth and emphasize the power of the Real in human life, the Real apprehended through the Senses, *as against*

the Ideal. And this is what Llewelyn is always looking for in his authors—a robust assertion of the divinity of the senses as against every other divinity !

Many of my brother's admirers, being averse—good easy men—to the dust of controversy, have greatly regretted his debouchings and sly sallies into the perilous arenas of morals and religion; but, after all, a writer's character is his character, and there is something satisfying about a consistency that, like a ram invading a fowl-run, refuses to budge, or to cease snuffing quizzically at the "chicken-feed," for all the indignant flutter.

Sturdily indeed does Llewelyn Powys reiterate his obstinate conviction that things are as they seem—bone-real, not puff-ball ideal—and that if we are too timid to take this tough world at its face-value we'd best cry quit and let it spin; for by Cock and Pye we shall get no more, no ! not a stiver, charm we never so wisely.

And what power there still is—invisible as well as visible—in the *status quo* of established tradition ! This can be seen in the weary derision with which, half-unconsciously perhaps, easy-going people "put into Coventry," as the school-boys say, a writer who can't leave well alone.

"Why doesn't Llewelyn Powys go back to his enchanting sketches of country-life? Why doesn't he go back to his travels and the engaging whimsies of his friends and relations? Why must he tilt, like

a crotchety Don Quixote, *gone suddenly sane*—a murrain on him!—at the age-old irrationalities of Church and State? ”

For how should we not—we mumping mummers of the Unseen, the Unheard, the Untouched—wince and grow testy, when this old incorrigible Visible World that we have been at such pains to perforate with our “second thoughts” is made to loom up again, solid and ultimate as ever?

Personally I still think there is more in life than he wots of, with his four-square visible world. Yes, for all your goats-beard poetizing of the five senses, Master, I am as certain as ever I was that the real reality lies behind it all, and that “something” in us answers to “something” outside it all.

But I know what moonshine these “somethings” of mine are to you; and the question between us is as old as humanity. Long after we are dead this tug-of-war will still be going on; and you may take my word for it, it will never be only the established interests, never only the proprietors and the proprieties, that will be upset by your “stamped, sealed, and delivered” sense-world!

Well, after all, it is for the way these things are written, for the humour in them and the passion and the poetry in them, that posterity will read our disputes. When I think of this I fear sometimes that the tough-minded realists like Llewelyn Powys and his robust predecessors are bound in nature to have the prevailing word. But then I console

myself by remembering that neither words, nor the lively senses from which they draw their vigour, have ever yet proved themselves equal to limiting the mystery of life.

JOHN COWPER POWYS

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Grateful acknowledgment is made to the following Journals for allowing some of these essays to be reprinted: *The Aryan Path*, *The Bookman*, *John O' London's Weekly*, *The Nineteenth Century and After*, *The Rationalist Annual*, *The Dublin Magazine*, *The Saturday Review of Literature*, *The New York Herald Tribune*, *The Virginia Quarterly*, *The Literary Guide*.

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G. M. Powys.

DIONYSOS

DIONYSOS

IT is interesting to meditate upon the similarity and difference between the Christian and the Dionysian cults, between these two imaginary deities who have had so memorable an influence upon the world. Out of the fecund earth the race of men arose, rank protagonists, moon-mad, sun-begotten, their fleeting stay above ground bewildered by the violence of their emotions, by the ineffectual ratiocinations of their light brains. Their distracting predicament quickened their spirits to invent dreams of redemption.

In every land these religious interpretations have sprung up, and the figure of Jesus and the figure of Dionysos have represented centres of worship for two very significant streams of religious philosophy.

There exists a persistent legend that the mysterious Nysa, where the nymph suckled Dionysos in a cave, is actually situated on the bank of a tributary of the river Jordan, not far from the city of Beisan in Palestine. It is possible, therefore, that not only on the spiritual plane, but on the physical plane as well, by a natal chance of actual geographical proximity, these two protagonists of human liberation may be closely associated. I like to think it is

so. I like to think that the wild sensitive spirit of Jesus and the wild sensitive spirit of Dionysos were both incarnate upon the same parcel of Syrian soil, that they both saw the sun rise and set over a similar landscape as they played by day ; and after darkness had fallen, lay in the arms of their mothers, intent to listen to the voices of the night. Jesus shared with Dionysos the gift of prophecy, shared with him an impatience with human bigotry, and like him could upon occasions display the unpredictable temper of a God. But there the convergence of the two ends. The teaching of Jesus in its ultimate essence is more subtle, more sophisticated, more decadent, and, with all reverence be it said, more subversive to human happiness. The Apollonian ideal of moral order, of intellectual enlightenment, of sanity, has been less dangerous. Jesus, through his idealism, through the example of his personal heroism, sought to exorcise for ever the despair men feel on discovering that the grass fields of their familiar earth hide cracks and gulfs of horror. He called upon his followers to bring redemption to life by denying life, to save their souls by losing them ; and not only was earth-life repudiated by him on the score of its darker secrets, but also on account of its lure " of things too sweet."

The Dionysian guidance, the Dionysian art of life, was simpler and braver. This mountain god, hailing ultimately from the far north and immediately from Thrace, taught that the recoil from lurking

terror can be resolved only by a still more abandoned acceptance of the vital principle. The true Dionysian spirit endeavours always to become one with the very Yggdrasil root of existence so greatly to be feared, so greatly to be adored. It does not attempt to undertake the impossible task of controlling life after the Apollonian tradition, still less does it turn aside from life after the Christian manner. It ratifies life, embraces life, and aims through ecstasy of worship to become identified with the reality behind matter, behind the shivering wave-lengths of the objective universe; to become one with that mysterious stir that first troubled the inanimate. In those moments when the authentic transport, the true Dionysian rapture has taken possession of a man, all is forgotten. He shares with the cat the glare of her green eyes, and with the mouse, damp with her spittle, the ecstasy of martyrdom. Then when the madness is over there follows in the lull, in the succeeding hush "of the silence of the Bacchæ," the most strange, the most precious of all religious experiences, when, in a state of mystic quietude, the worshipper meditates with imagination, with compassion, upon the thronging irresponsible dream presented to his senses. There exists always an undying antithesis between the regular and the irregular, between the ordered and the disordered; and, although in practice it is incumbent upon all civil spirits to engage in the hopeless struggle against stupidity, injustice, and cruelty, we can still preserve with edification an area

of secret conviction, an area of personal affirmation of the more oblique, the more implacable metaphysic.

Whenever we separate ourselves from Nature we do so at our peril. The restrictions, however necessary they may be, imposed upon our free happiness by society are in themselves pernicious, and when we add to them the gratuitous restraints of ascetic persuasions, the health, the generosity of the strongest soul is in jeopardy. Any inordinate forcing of selflessness defeats its own end, for a stage is reached when the outraged person will turn upon himself, upon others. In the religion of Dionysos this tension finds relief. When the satyr train left "their brooms and cold mushrooms"; when the Bacchæ, thyrsus in hand, danced with heads thrown back; when the wise Silenus was on his "gaping" ass behind the triumphant leopard-drawn chariot, civilized ceremony was annulled, discounted under a blithe amoral dispensation. Once more the flood-gates of Nature were open and the world was happy. It was not for nothing that the ancients named India as the country of this God's most important conquest, India that more than any other land has harboured thoughts recreant to the sun.

At any moment a Dionysian neophyte may, in a state of exultant consciousness, be in communion with the vital leap which exists beyond and below all human commitments. Yesterday as I came along a lane in April sunshine I experienced the perennial thrill. It came to me with so common a spectacle

as nettles growing in the ditch and smelling rough in the new heat of the spring, of nettles unknown in heaven, thrusting themselves up through the cow parsley with all the wilful assurance of the vegetable world at the approach of a new season.

Dionysos was essentially a vegetable God. His life, they used to say, was in "the sap and bark"; and in our time his unstable influence is still suggested by the more wanton growths of the open country, by the sprawling trailer of the blackberry, by the vigour of the throttling ivy, and by the gnarled and contorted vine-stump out of which the images and idols of the God—so Walter Pater declared—used to be carved. These vegetable growths, then, are his most apparent symbols, suggesting the bountiful aspect of his religion that leads our minds to a comprehensive acceptance of a condition of intense poetic sensibility which recognizes as sacramental the plain food of our nourishment—brown meat, yellow honey, bread, and, above all, wine.

It would seem that intoxication was not used by his followers as a substitute in the Freudian sense, but rather as a positive instrument of grace through the use of which life could be experienced more abundantly, the manifestations of the physical world being then seen through "divine eyeballs." We have here the highest reward of the Dionysian mood, the power it can exert to stir men out of their congenital lethargy, out of their gross habit of accepting existence with unillumined minds. Such lumpish-

ness is not possible to those who follow in the train of "mad Dionysos" and his nurses, who follow in the train of him "who lives in the tree." For, as that man of many mischiefs, Plato, said, "the madness sent by God is better than the moderation of men." No higher function is possible to religion than to evoke a transported contemplation of the mystery of existence here on earth. During these inspired states dolour is dissipated, our petty preoccupations vanquished. True religion derives directly from the sense of awe natural in man at his first wakening to consciousness. "Shall things of dust the God's dark ways despise?"

There is a valuable secret in this orgiastic tradition. Civilized society has not been satisfied with the success it has had in subjecting our individual desires to its service, but, still apprehensive, it deliberately disparages sensuality, wilfully coercing the carnal urge towards its ideal of submissive domesticity. With this consummation of man's life decried it is small wonder that the faces in our streets are careworn and bitter, so that it has come to seem almost a mockery to mention this deity of the grape-cluster. The Dionysian spirit gives its sanction to every declaration of freedom, it stands in stubborn opposition to theories of idealistic teaching. Whenever two or three are gathered together in happiness, there is present the God-like figure of Dionysos. He is the deity who brings to man the greatest wisdom, teaching him to turn back to natural joys

and with a free mind to drink, to laugh, to dance. What can we do better than to cast ourselves before this great Nature-God, accepting the cruelty and ugliness as inseparable from life, recognizing their intrusion with a level eye, and yet continuing our laudations with an infatuated trust? There is no more deadly enemy of the lust for aggression, for empire, than the Dionysian compassion, the Dionysian happiness, the Dionysian generosity and strength. This Dasyllios, the dweller in the thickets, this Agrionios, the ruthless one, puts us into a state to accept the riot of the visible. With our sight purged by his exultation we experience God-like excitement from the simplest spectacle—from the crafty physiognomy of an owl peering down at us from its beam stool, from the flickering butterflies!

To meditate upon the handiwork of the Sun, “whom men call Dionysos,” we can do nothing better. There is no cry that approximates more nearly to the voice of the earth than the “goat cry” of this suffering and debonnaire God. From the forests it rises, from the vineyards, from the rustling cornfields, reaching to the farthest stars whose light has turned red with age. “O Dionysos, in no wise endured by mortals.” It is a cry charged with thought beyond the scrupulous reason, with thought commingled with the senses, with the more errant emotions, the cry of the planet, explicit of terror, explicit of ecstasy. How in the height of summer, at the time of the solstice, the thick hayfields, the

tangled hedges—the most inconspicuous meadow-corner decked as for a gala—put us in mind of this ancient adoration, fill us with the assurance that Dionysos will come again, will return to earth once more with his fox-maidens swarming about his triumphal car! To surrender ourselves utterly to a consciousness that surpasses consciousness—this is our largest release. It is a religion that can never die. It has in it a solace for the yearning of the human heart. For this reason it was strong enough to force its acceptance upon the temperate Greeks. At first the Hellenic mind found difficulty in assimilating its wild rout. Eventually, however, it came to share equal honours with the cult of Apollo, as is proved by the huge stone at Delphi with these words carved upon it: “Here lieth the body of Dionysos the son of Semele.” It was an example of sacerdotal roguery of the simpler and nobler sort; though, whether regarded in the light of fact or of allegory, it remained none the less a deceit to be discredited. The truth of it is that Dionysos, with his race of “worthless, idle satyrs,” can never die.

“By his own joy I vow
By the grape upon the bough.”

This faith lies below Christianity, below science. It is as much opposed to transcendental values as it is to matter-of-fact values. Always it draws its indestructible power from the senses. It claims the glory of life to be revealed by the flesh of man. In the face of all ultimate issues it is sceptical, dis-

illusioned. At the best our difficult compromises are inconsequently ephemeral, comparable to the thriftless applications of gnats, which, doomed instantly to an ignominious extinction, whirl through a twilight air above a swiftly flowing river without dykes or weirs. What has happened to all those heroic causes of the past for which so much human blood has been shed, and for the achievement of which so much human passion has been expended? Magnanimities, despicable villainies, all swept away, all forgotten! The evening of the crucifixion did not stay for one single second the untiring procedure of manifold Nature. The hyæna, with hindquarters slouched, came slinking that night over the dusty hillside to sniff after the buried yellow bones of a punctilious Pharisee; the mangered Palm Sunday ass stopped her braying on the Mount of Olives as, with a single intention, she turned her grey head towards the heap of fodder thrown into the dusty corner of her shed. On a battle-field where a thousand men lie mutilated, the dandelions and buttercups patiently, punctually, close their petals at the going down of the sun. The basic structure of earth-life is subject to an appalling precipitation. The religion of Dionysos accepts this fact, makes no pretence that it is otherwise. Its votaries are content to celebrate existence without exacting reservations, to worship the unthinking omnipotent force with inebriate fervour as the red sap of confident life pours through their veins.

If once we have given ourselves to this redeemed vision, then we can afford to tamper with our pre-concerted moralities. For every day through our windows we shall hear the unmistakable cry strengthening our infirm bodies, dispelling our ghostly mistrusts, and forcing us to acknowledge the triumph of disobedient life. In so far as we succeed in impressing each one of our experiences with the Dionysian spirit, we shall be happy. As young men, as old men, to acclaim the glory of life with ungrudging senses, this is the ultimate loyalty.



G. M. Powys.

AKHENATON, THE SUN-
WORSHIPPER

AKHENATON, THE SUN-WORSHIPPER

“ Still we hear it—
Clear, immortal, undying—
The old sweet chant
Of those who worship the sun ! ”

YESTERDAY I unearthed a remarkable ammonite in a Dorset sea-coast cliff. The noonday sun was shining bright upon the circular whorls of the fossil, the formation of which suggested that I had uncovered a ram's horn of enormous proportions which, through the passing of long geological ages, had become ossified. Ulysses might well have escaped from the cave of Polyphemus clinging to the golden-fleeced belly of an animal whose neck had been strong enough to support such armour. As I examined the stone with the sunlight illuminating each crevice of its surface, there came to my mind the record of an ancient war between two gods. The name of the fossil I looked at was derived, I knew, from the Egyptian deity whose symbol was a ram's horn.

Thirty-three hundred years have gone by since Akhenaton challenged the power of the priests of Thebes, whose superstitions were especially associated with Ammon. In early times the human race was prone to explain the inexplicable with supernatural

imaginings. As man's brain developed, separating him farther and farther from the beasts of the field, his unexercised intelligence followed naturally enough the easiest and simplest paths suggested—paths of irrational inference. To look at the mummified skulls of the early Egyptians, so narrow, so hare-like in shape, is to realize in a flash how inevitable was this period of ghostly assumptions. The unexpected intrusion of the natural worship of Akhenaton, out of all theoretic time-sequence, is one of the most startling happenings in the story of religious growth.

The Pharaohs of the eighteenth dynasty had come to attribute their military success to the strong arm of Ammon. It was, they thought, through the roaring of Ammon, the great god of Thebes, that Egyptian suzerainty had been advanced into the heart of Syria. Amenhotep I had not hesitated to appropriate to his own personal use the awful syllables of the god's name, while Thothmes III ascribed his military success to Ammon's partiality.

The origin of Akhenaton's revolutionary views remains obscure. Some have suggested that his mind was influenced by his mother, the celebrated dowager queen, who may have had first-hand knowledge of the various cults of the Syrian Adon, or Adonis, as he was known in Greece; others would have us believe that the new faith was at first a mere matter of statecraft, by means of which the young Pharaoh hoped to free the throne from the irksome thralldom of an exacting hierarchy. Those of us,

however, who read with understanding the religious sayings of the epoch, will soon become convinced that this interlude of philosophic monotheism, born out of due time, owed its existence above everything to the spiritual genius of this most interesting and original of all the Pharaohs. "The words of Ra are before me. . . . My august father (God) taught me their essence and revealed them to me. . . . They were known in my heart, opened to my face. I understood." The death-mask of Akhenaton confirms this, the withered shell of his countenance being eloquent still of his soul's profound yearning. Indeed, it was his sensitive response to religious feeling, in its deeper and more refined aspects, which caused him to recoil so violently from the crude conceptions prevailing in Egypt—prevailing in that ancient nest out of which all priestly tribes of the world have sprung.

Akhenaton found it incredible that the secret of life could centre about a God of terrible judgments, a God of war. This "great one of visions," with the quick insight of a prophet, sought the Deity on a more spiritual plane, sought him in the reality behind reality, in that sphere "whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere."

Men of science to-day assure us that, if God exists, his influence is to be found in that margin of physical sub-atomic matter, which may be likened to a veritable Merlin's circle of mystery, out of the reach of man's sense observation. Akhenaton in his philosophy

found God in this area. This absolute "behind the sun" to which he renders homage is the absolute which we conceive behind the group-waves, behind ultimate matter. But Akhenaton was not only a religious prophet—he was an artist and a poet, and in moments of inspiration he was able to see God's shadow upon the waters of the Nile, was able to hear his breath amid the bland flowers of his pleasure-garden at noon. "Thy love is great and large. Thou fillest the two lands of Egypt with Thy love."

In a subtle manner he seems to have identified Aton, a word ultimately derived from Adon (the sinking sun), with Ra-Horakhti (the ancient sun-god of Heliopolis) until the end of his reign. "The Aton" stood alone as the one and only God for whom the disc of the sun was taken as the outward and visible sign. Akhenaton was the first man to apprehend the immortal secret that God is where poetry is; is present in the rustling leaves of amorous date-palms; is present in the depths of tropical oceans, where unnamed fish seek for their meat with blank, patient stare; is present with the calf as it frolics in a field of scarlet poppies; is confederate with the light-waves of the farthest nebulae beyond our own island universe.

So inimical were the Theban priests, and so sottish were the common people to his new religion, that Akhenaton took the drastic and dramatic step of abandoning the capital city and founding another

royal city, "The City of the Horizon of Aton," farther up the Nile, some hundred and sixty miles above where the city of Cairo now stands.

There, in a lovely valley on the eastern bank of the great stream, protected by high escarpments, temple, palace, and villa rose up to the glory of Aton. In this happy holiday city, the old sacerdotal, necrophiliastic beliefs were largely superseded, and men and women, boys and girls, were taught, with minds free and bodies free, to worship the creative force in spirit and in truth. The new temples were constructed with altars open to the sunshine, and upon these altars sacrifices were made without bloodshed; vegetables, fruit, and flowers being substituted for animal, for human flesh. In his decorations Akhenaton introduced a completely new form of art, a strange art, spontaneous and at the same time archaic; while for the first time in the history of Egypt a Pharaoh is portrayed moving freely among his people. A twilight hour had fallen upon Ammon. Peace and goodwill towards men had come to Egypt. And it is to be noticed that in the frescoes the "prisoner and captives" are no longer being spitefully treated.

"O tremulous hope! O large escape
From the intolerable oppressors!
O bent and bowed resume your shape,
And dispossess the dispossessors."

From various sources we gather that the population of the City of the Horizon passed its hours in a

manner at once simple and sophisticated. There is a butterfly delicacy about the life of this Utopia of antiquity that has never been equalled. "There is no poverty for him who has set thee, Oh ! Aton, in his heart. It is impossible for such a one to say ' Oh ! that I had.' " Always we see Akhenaton, this young intellectual Pharaoh, represented under a halo of physical and spiritual grace. In happy guise we see him driving abroad in his chariot with Nefertiti, his darling, his heart's root, at his side. Carelessly he curbs his two mettlesome horses, while she lifts her head to kiss his lips as a bird might flutter before settling upon an overhanging bough. We see him reclining at a feast, the table heaped with fruit and flowers, and his little handmaid daughters, so precious to him, standing by with pretty offerings. It is small wonder his oath of favourite use was " As my heart is happy in the Queen and her children," or that he alluded to Nefertiti as " Mistress of my happiness at hearing whose voice the King rejoices." All the harsh values of the world were reversed in this favoured city, beauty and happiness being recognized as the twin aims of life. On every side the refined æsthetic tastes of the King were reflected : in the decorative cobras carved on the lintels of his airy halls, in the lotus flowers about the capitals of the tall columns, in the coloured ostrich-plumed standards, in the very paving-stones, so warm to a naked foot, where wild-fowl were pictured disturbing the marsh insects as they rose out of the rushes.

“So six long years he revell’d, night and day,
 And when the mirth wax’d loudest, with dull sound
 Sometimes from the grove’s centre echoes came,
 To tell his wondering people of their king,
 In the still night, across the steaming flats,
 Mix’d with the murmur of the moving Nile.”

More than ever confident of his new religion, Akhenaton now made an attempt to eradicate out of the land the very memory of Aton’s rival, the dreaded Ammon-Ra of Thebes. His couriers and officials were instructed to make an exhaustive search through every town and village for the purpose of erasing all signs and symbols of the hated name. A decree had gone forth from the Glory of Aton that the God Ammon “should die and not live.” So thorough were the messengers that they travelled into the farthest deserts, and wherever the word “Ammon” appeared on rock or quarry wall it was effaced. They even ventured to open royal tombs, and were not content until the baleful letters had been obliterated from the tiniest funeral ornament. All memory of this King of the Gods was to be removed, and even from the name of his own father, Akhenaton did not hesitate to strike out the hated syllables.

The worship of Akhenaton, this “Son of the Sun” as he delighted to call himself, consisted in the conscious adoration of the mysterious force that sustains not only the shadows of flesh that are men, but the whole riot of the objective universe. The symbol of the sun’s disc was represented as shedding down the beneficent “heat which-is-in-Aton” upon mortal

life, upon animal life, upon bird life, upon fish life, and upon insect life, each ray being limned with a diminutive hand of benediction. It was a religion uncontaminated, exacting no other obligation than a disposition of worship before the unfathomable secrets of existence. "Thou art alone, but infinite vitalities are in Thee by means of which to give life to Thy creatures." The hours of dawn and of sunset were set apart for prayer. It was then that the "beauties" of the Aton were most apparent, and it is at those hours that human beings are most susceptible to the influence of sublimity. To Akhenaton and his followers "living in truth" the power behind the Aton was "Lord of Fate, Origin of Fate and of Chance which gives life." How the words of this man come down to us from that remote time, having still upon them the stamp of his mind, simple, sincere, and deeply poetical. "This beautiful child of Aton" gives us the clue to an honourable religion. Utterances of pure gold are upon his lips, upon the lips of this "Lord of Sweetness"—a title often to be found inscribed on the backs of the scarabs of his period.

It was the influence of the Aton that caused "the food and fatness of Egypt." It was the Aton which was "a witness of that which pertains to eternity . . . the remembrancer of eternity." It was the sun that symbolized the intangible, ineffable spirit present everywhere throughout the objective substance of matter, the procreant urge that had created "flesh, bones, and all things that have to do with the per-

fection of man's nature." It was the same omnipotent influence, made manifest in Ra, which "had brought up millions by its bounty. All that thou hast made," cried Akhenaton, "leaps before thee! . . . It is life to see Him, there is death in not seeing Him."

Of all the hymns of praise that human tongues have chanted from the cornlands of the earth, few can compare to Akhenaton's chant preserved to us in stiff hieroglyphics. Out of the dust men have risen—animals of wit, prevision, and feeling—and in spite of taloned fingers and hairy scalps, they have been found capable of celebrating with mouths of clay the Glory of Life. The universe under its primal discipline, with heavy atoms and light atoms as much active in the eye of the sovereign serpent as in the remotest star-cloud, has cast up thought, and from the curved lips of intelligence there rises a pæan of worship as moving as the sound of the sea, as charmed as wind in a forest. It is as though mind sang to mind, matter to matter, the sun to the sun :—

"Thy rising is beautiful in the horizon of heaven. O thou Aton, who hadst thine existence in primeval times. When thou risest in the eastern horizon thou fillest every land with thy beauties. Thou art beautiful to see, and art great, and art like crystal, and art high above the earth. . . . Thou art remote, but thy beams are upon the earth. . . . So long as thou art in the heavens day shall follow thy footsteps. When thou settest in the western horizon the earth is in darkness and is like a being that is dead.

Men lie down and sleep in their habitations, their heads are covered up, and their nostrils stopped and no man can see his neighbour. . . . When thou risest in the horizon the earth lightens, and when thy beams shine forth it is day. . . . Over all the earth men perform their work. All beasts and cattle repose in their pastures, and the trees and the green herb put forth their leaves and flowers. The birds fly out of their nests and their wings praise thee as they fly forth. . . . The boats float down and sail up the river likewise, for thy path is opened when thou risest. The fish in the stream leap up towards thy face, and thy beams shine through the waters of the great sea. Thou makest male seed to enter into women, and thou causest the liquid seed to become a human being. Thou makest the man-child to live in the body of his mother. Thou makest him to keep silent so that he cry not, and thou art a nurse to him in the womb.

. . . When the chicken is in the egg, and is making a sound within the shell, thou givest it air inside it so that it may keep alive. Thou bringest it to perfection so that it may split the egg shell. How manifold are thy works ! They are hidden from before us, O thou sole God, whose power no other possesseth. Thou didst create the earth according to thy desire, while thou wast alone : men, all cattle large and small, that are upon the earth, that go upon their feet, all that are on high, that fly with their wings, the countries of Syria and Nubia, and the land of Egypt."

This enlightened religion lasted but a brief space. Akhenaton died about the year 1358 B.C., when he was still a young man, and even before his death had

been strictly taught that the rough world was unripe for his innocent cult. His pacific persuasions squared ill with his age. Greed and lust for power—what consideration were they likely to show to so civilized a Prince, whose chief delight lay in religion and whose principal happiness was involved in his beautiful Nefertiti, “who sends the Aton to rest with a sweet voice, and with her two beautiful hands bearing two systums”? All Syria was soon in rebellion, and disaster followed disaster.

Akhenaton, it seems, died suddenly, perhaps of epilepsy. It was now the turn of the priests for revenge. From every monument the new word “Aton” was erased. They too visited the necropolis and broke into the tomb of Akhenaton, into the tomb of “that criminal,” as he was now referred to in documents of state. Fortunately they omitted to deface the death inscription on the coffin: “The Beautiful Prince, the chosen one of Ra, the King of upper and lower Egypt, living in Truth, Lord of the Two Lands, Akhenaton, the beautiful child of the living Aton, whose name shall live for ever and for ever.”



G. M. Powys.

CONFUCIUS

CONFUCIUS

K'UNG FUTZE, the philosopher K'ung, or, in its Latinized form, Confucius, was born some eight hundred years after the death of Akhenaton, the Egyptian sun-worshipping Pharaoh. During his span of life the battle of Marathon was fought, the Jews returned from their captivity and rebuilt their temple at Jerusalem, Lars Porsena failed to reinstate the Tarquins at Rome, and the early inhabitants of Britain, with stag-horns for picks and the shoulder-blades of oxen for shovels, were engaged in raising earthworks.

The civilization of China is of such extreme antiquity, and the spiritual and mental orientations of the Mongolian races are so different from our own, that it is hard to estimate the position that Confucius takes as a world teacher. Probably no Western mind has ever appreciated him at his true worth; indeed, it is perhaps possible for us only to guess at the significance he has for the yellow races, more numerous than flies.

The Chinese, with their quaint jigsaw minds, childish, but at the same time extremely profound, have never been distinguished for what is known to us as "a religious sense." The references to God con-

tained in their ancient books—in the Yi-King and Shu-King, for instance—are so light that they could never have been responsible for the gloomy fanaticism that we associate with such cities as Thebes, Babylon, Jerusalem, or Mecca. By these practical rice-cultivators, who used to believe that the earth was square, the day-by-day manners of a man are regarded as being of much more consequence than his opinions.

These Chinese, with heads like pots of yellow clay, have never rated the faculty of faith very high, and for the most part have no knowledge of those mystical intimations out of which our metaphysical idealism arises. With regard to supernatural matters, the cultivated classes have remained throughout the generations ironically sceptical, leaving it as the prerogative of the swarming masses to indulge in superstitions. Confucius himself declared that it was man's greatest wisdom to concern himself exclusively with his human duties and as far as possible to keep himself out of the way of "spiritual beings."

The disciples of Confucius did not hesitate to declare that their master made a ternion with Heaven and Earth. "He may be compared to heaven and earth, in their supporting and containing, their overshadowing and containing, all things. He may be compared to the four seasons in their alternating progress and the sun and moon in their successive shining." Such exaggerated adulation in no way interferes with an impression of homeliness that is

gradually formed in one's mind of this punctilious prophet who often seems to prophesy backwards. Confucius believed manners to be the very crux of social organization. He believed that men were by nature both benevolent and obedient, and if those in authority could only be persuaded to set them good examples of decorum, the world would be happy. If those in authority were in doubt as to correct behaviour, they had but to look into the past for a hundred perfect patterns.

"If any ruler would submit to me as his director for twelve months, I should accomplish something considerable, and in three years I should attain the realizations of my hopes. . . . It would be no more difficult a thing to bring the Empire into a state of tranquillity than for a man to look upon the palm of his hand." "It is all a matter," he used to say in his ambiguous manner, "of rectifying names." There is good government "when the prince is prince, and the minister is minister; when the father is father, and the son is son."

In his opinion, natural affections, natural dependencies and loyalties, are unfailing warranties for the stability of States :—

"With the right administration government would be rapid just as vegetation is rapid in its season; yea, the government would display itself like an easily growing rush. . . . The relation between superiors and inferiors is like that between the wind and the grass. The grass must bend when the wind blows across it. . . .

Great, indeed, was Yacu as a sovereign. . . . How glorious were his elegant regulations which he instituted. . . . May not Shun be instanced as having governed efficiently? What did he do? He did nothing but gravely and reverently occupy his imperial seat."

The emphasis that Confucius laid upon the value of the proprieties, met with criticism, even in his life-time. When it seemed likely that he was going to be put into a position of power by the Duke Ts'e, a certain courtier vehemently protested. "Scholars," he said, "are impracticable and cannot be imitated. They are haughty and conceited of their own views. . . . This Mr. K'ung (Confucius) has a thousand peculiarities. It would take generations to exhaust all that he knows about the ceremonies of going up and going down."

On another occasion, when he was driving about China looking for a prince who would be willing to put his theories into practice, his carriage was stopped by a mad hermit. It was in the district of Ts'oo, and the man shouted, "O Fung, O Fung, how is your virtue degenerated! As to the past, reproof is useless, but the future may be provided against. Give up, give up your vain pursuit." Confucius, with the open-mindedness of a true philosopher, immediately got out of his carriage, wishing to hear more, but the recluse ran away.

This power of viewing himself objectively was evidently natural to Confucius. It is noticeable in the following anecdote. Compelled on a certain

occasion to fly from a victorious army, Confucius arrived at the city gate in some confusion. His presence was reported to the Prince in the following manner : " There is a man standing by the East Gate, with a forehead like Yaou, a neck like Kaou-Yaou, and altogether having the disconsolate appearance of a stray dog." When this description of himself in due course reached the ears of Confucius, he made this comment : " The bodily appearance is but a small matter, but to say I was like a stray dog—capital, capital ! "

Many of his idiosyncratic habits and methods of thought have been preserved to us by his devoted disciples. In conversation, we are told, he spoke " minutely and cautiously." There were four subjects that he would never talk about : " Uncanny happenings, feats of strength, rebellions, and ghosts." As a young man he would not shoot at a bird when it was sitting, or catch a fish in a net, because he considered such methods gave the creatures no fair chance of escape. When resting he was careful not to lie as a corpse lies. On seeing a table well provided with provisions he would turn pale. He liked his rice ground small and his meat minced and both dishes served with appropriate sauces. He insisted upon having ginger always on the table. If he sat down with a mourner he could never eat to repletion. In the presence of the blind he would always stand up.

That he had a weakness for the great ones of the

earth cannot be disputed. It is said that when he passed the vacant place of the Prince,

“ his countenance appeared to change, and his legs bend under him, and his words came like those of one who hardly had breath to utter them. . . . When he came out from the audience and he had descended one step, he began to relax his countenance, and had a satisfied look. When he had got to the bottom of the steps, he advanced rapidly to his place, with his arms like wings, and on occupying it, his manner still showed respectful uneasiness.”

It must also be said, however, that he was quick to give spiritual and intellectual gifts their due, as is shown by his quaintly significant remark after his meeting with the philosopher Lao-tze at Chow : “ To-day I have seen a dragon.”

In the analects we are given glimpses of his family life that are full of interest. After the death of his mother it was a long time before he would play upon his lute. He marked the place of her grave with an enormous barrow that he might never have difficulty in finding it, a necessary precaution, so he declared, with a sure premonition of his future, “ to a man who belonged to the North, the South, the East, and the West.” When his first child was born, the Duke Ch’aou sent him as a gift a carp, and Confucius immediately named his infant son Carp.

We should like to hear more about the relationship between this father and son. A disciple once ques-

tioned the Carp about his father, and the young man volunteered this story :—

“ He [Confucius] was standing alone once when I was passing through the court below with hasty steps, and said to me, ‘ Have you read the Odes ? ’ On my replying, ‘ Not yet,’ he added, ‘ If you do not learn the Odes, you will not be fit to converse with. . . . Have you read the Rules of Propriety ? ’ At my replying, ‘ Not yet,’ he added, ‘ Until you have read the Rules of Propriety your character cannot be established.’ ”

Perhaps it was in the same courtyard that Yuen Jang offended Confucius by squatting upon his heels in his presence. “ ‘ In youth not humble as befits a junior, in manhood doing nothing worthy of being handed down, and living on to old age : this is to be a pest.’ With this the Master hit him across the shank with his staff.”

The Carp was reproved for showing inordinate sorrow at the death of his mother. It has been suggested that Confucius did not get on very well with his wife, and when we read his considered judgment upon women and their position we can well believe this hearsay :—

“ Man is the representation of Heaven, and is supreme in all things. . . . Woman yields obedience to the instructions of man. . . . On his account she is subject to the rule of the three obediences. When young, she must obey her father and elder brother ; when married she

must obey her husband; when her husband is dead she must obey her son. . . . Women's business is simply the preparation and supplying of wine and food."

The Carp died before his celebrated father.

Confucius was no loiterer. He was convinced that destiny required him to fulfil his particular mission. "From the man bringing his bundle of dried flesh in payment for my teaching, I have never refused my instruction to anyone." At the same time he insisted upon a certain level of intelligence, and used to say that after he had showed a pupil one corner of a subject he considered his obligation ended. His respect he reserved for those scholars who pursued wisdom so passionately that they "forgot old age was coming on."

From his sayings it would be possible for anybody to formulate a working philosophy of life. They are as wholesome and easy to digest as pecan nuts falling out of a Mandarin's silken satchel :—

All men are good at birth, but not many remain so to the end.

A knowledge of propriety is the stem of a man. Without it he has no means of standing firm.

There being instruction, there will be no more distinction of classes.

As we use a glass to examine the forms of things, so must we study antiquity in order to understand the present.

Am I a bitter gourd? Am I to be hung up, out of the way of being eaten?

The bird chooses its tree. The tree does not choose the bird.

The superior man is distressed by his want of ability. He is not distressed by man's not knowing him.

What the superior man seeks is in himself. What the mean man seeks is in others.

The way of the superior man is threefold, but I am not equal to it. Virtuous, he is free from anxieties; wise, he is free from perplexities; bold, he is free from fear.

When, on another occasion, somebody asked him, "What do you say concerning the principle that injury should be recompensed with kindness?" he answered with shrewd good sense, "With what, then, will you recompense kindness? Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness." Tsze-Kung once asked him: "Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?" The Master said: "Is not Reciprocity such a word? What you do not want done to yourself do not do to others."

With regard to those deeper questions beyond the boundaries of the market-day life of the individual or state, Confucius is conspicuously reticent. From the earliest dawn of history, ancestor-worship has been a universal practice in China. Needless to say,

Confucius himself was scrupulous in the fulfilment of such rites. When, however, one of his disciples ventured to ask him for a word of guidance in serving the departed, he was answered with the following evasion : " Until you are able to serve men, how can you expect to serve their spirits ? " When he was asked point-blank whether or not men had knowledge after death, he answered : " You need not wish to know whether the dead have knowledge or not. There is no present urgency about this question. Hereafter you will know it for yourself."

There exists an ancient legend in China that when a sage mounts the throne and right principles are followed throughout the land, a bird like the phoenix, called the Fung Bird, will appear. This bird, so we are assured, was heard singing in the time of King Wân.

Confucius may well have regarded his own life as a failure. The only prince who had given him power had betrayed him for the sake of beautiful women. At the age of fifty, when he " knew the decrees of Heaven," he was raised from being the head magistrate of the city of Chung-tu to being the chief administrator of his native state. His enlightened measures soon made the State of Lu dangerously strong, and a neighbouring marquis devised the cunning plan of sending eighty dancing-girls of easy virtue as a gift to the sage's prince. All State affairs were immediately neglected, and Confucius could do nothing but leave in disgust.

A second tentative patron took the opportunity of consulting Confucius upon military tactics. "I have heard all about sacrificial vessels, but I have not learned military matters." Confucius left the next day. In another state—the State of Wei—the marquis was married to a notorious Chinese Jezebel named Nan-tsze, and it pleased him to have Confucius riding behind himself and his painted lady. Presently the populace began to note this and to chaff the seer, shouting till the pagodas echoed, "Lust in front, virtue behind." Once again Confucius felt constrained to go on his travels.

He lived to the age of seventy-three. The last years of his life were occupied with editing the classical books and with writing the history of his native state. Three times he is said to have worn out the leather thongs that bound together the manuscripts he was studying. About reforming the world he was no longer sanguine. "It is over!" he cried. "I have not seen one who loves virtue as he loves beauty."

One morning Tsze-Kung, his faithful disciple, waked to hear Confucius about early. He got up, and found the sage walking to and fro outside his door, his hands clasped behind his back, and with his mulberry staff dragging after him. The old man was mumbling to himself these words: "The great mountain must crumble, the strong beam must break, and the wise man wither away like a plant." After a little he said, "My time has come to die."

In seven days he was dead. He offered up no prayers. He was sustained by no hope of life after death. At the same time he betrayed no sign of apprehension. Few could have predicted that this neglected old man was to have more influence upon China than all of her Emperors put together.

“Our Master cannot be attained to, just in the same way as the heavens cannot be gone up to by the steps of a stair.” When Confucius left his first State employment a sympathetic onlooker remarked to one of his followers, “Heaven intends to use your master as a bell for the people.” A few years before, when the Buddha had gone into retirement in the Vindhya Mountains, it had been said that his fame spread “like the sound of a great bell hung in the canopy of the skies.” Since that far-off century, how many human ears have listened to the chiming of those two golden bells?

Immediately after his death Confucius was accorded the recognition that had been denied him in his life. The Duke Gae, who had always carefully refrained from consulting him, now lamented: “Heaven has not left to me the aged man. There is none now to assist me on the throne. Woe is me! Alas!” He caused a temple to be built over the grave of Confucius and arranged that sacrifices should be offered up to his spirit at each of the four seasons of the year. To this day this worship of “K’ung, the ancient teacher, the perfect sage,” is

continued by his followers, counted now by the hundred million.

“Great art thou, O perfect Sage! Thy virtue is full; thy doctrine is complete. Among mortal men there has not been thine equal. . . . Full of awe we sound our drums and bells.”



G. M. Powys.

ARISTIPPUS

ARISTIPPUS

“ The senses are liars. Do not believe them ! ”

“ Know, then, that all this is but an empty store of words, which has been drawn up and arraigned against the senses.”

So it has gone from the earliest times as though two opposing “ Jacks ” were alternately striking the great, resonant clock-bell of life every few minutes—ding, dong, ding, dong ! Aristippus, the master of the Cyrenaic school of hedonistic philosophy, lit upon his illumination of “ the true word ” through his contact with Socrates, and his plain speaking has had, ever since, a deep effect upon the thought of mankind. How many Epicureans in every country have done honour to this teaching from the sunny seaside colony on the coast of Africa !

Even among Greek philosophers Aristippus was remarkable for his frolic wit. Less timorous than Epicurus, he appears in the world of thought as a kind of Panurge passing gaily from city to city with a cock’s feather in his cap. “ He was ever one,” wrote Diogenes Lærtius, “ who derived pleasure from what is present and did not toil to procure the enjoyment of something not present.”

Apparently it was on the occasion of his visiting

the Olympian games that he first fell under the influence of Socrates. He had crossed over from Cyrene to attend the classical celebrations. While mixing with the fair-field crowd he happened to fall in with a pupil of the famous philosopher and was eager in accepting an offer of an introduction to the notable Athenian. Already acquainted with the assertion of Protagoras that the sensation of the moment was "the only ultimate reality," he required but a hint from his new master to appreciate, in a flash, how unsure are the foundations supporting orthodox thought and morality. Socrates had always insisted that virtue was the true human good, though conceding happiness to be a subsidiary end. The daring mind of his new pupil pounced upon this adjuvant thought, and, forthwith denying to virtue any especial virtue *in itself*, pronounced that it was the business of every wise man to direct his entire attention towards the attainment of pleasure. Socrates had always placed intellectual pleasures above those deriving from the body. Aristippus would have none of this, boldly declaring that such scholarly pastimes were not comparable with the direct, and far more satisfying, ecstasies of the body.

Even the undelusive consummations incident to higher mathematical studies were depreciated by him. He placed such "diversions" below handicrafts, seeing that in them "the better and the worse played no part." The practical conduct of life was

all his cry, and its main purpose he took to be a scrupulous garnering of the rich harvest of the senses. In so far as intellectual sophistications interfered with this supreme aim, he rejected them out of hand, holding that any absolute knowledge was beyond man's reach for all time—accepted knowledge being merely a relative convention, an unreliable mental mirage of what appears to each separate individual to be true, feeling offering, in his opinion, the only valid criticism of both behaviour and knowledge. “As modes of being affected alone are knowable,” it follows, as the day the night, that the past is nothing, the future nothing, and that the sensual experiences of the moment are alone of consequence. Of such experiences none could possibly rival for depth and intensity the delights of love-making. It appeared to Aristippus that the basic principle of all life was to be found in two states of being, the state of happiness and the state of pain, the one the child of wisdom, and the other the child of folly, the one agreeable and the other repellent to every living thing. Epicurus taught that if the mind could be free from anxiety and the body from physical disorders, happiness would inevitably be present. So tame a form of happiness would have been repudiated with contempt by Aristippus, who believed it was possible to plan for pleasures, and in some cases to snatch them from the hands of envious Fate, as a dog will snatch a cold woodcock from out of a pantry window. It seemed

to him that happiness was as accessible to the poor as to the rich and was a condition that could be induced by a cunning wisdom. In order that a man should never become a slave to his passions, complete self-mastery was essential. A man should be able to curb his desires or abandon himself to them in accordance with the dictates of prudence and good sense.

Cyrene, the home of Aristippus, was the most ancient of five Greek colonial towns situated on the coast of Libya. It was built far up on a terraced slope in a locality so virginal fresh that it was calculated to incline men's minds to pleasure-loving conclusions—to those philosophic conclusions, in fact, that Pascal disparaged as being “pernicious to all who have a natural tendency to impiety or vice.” The thought of these Cyrenaics became as light as the mountain air they breathed, as light as that wonderful rarefied air that was said to nourish and refine the fleeces of their sheep, fleeces unsurpassed for a particularly high-class staple, and which was also rumoured to impregnate the very mares, as, ready to start at the rustle of a green lizard, they faced the breeze on those upland pasture-grounds with quivering nostrils miraculously receptive to so vital a breath.

As this favoured people rested beneath the shadows of conduit-cooled fig trees, or clambered in holiday mood along steep and lonely slopes far up above the restless waves, they refused to be intimidated by the

morbid deceits of either metaphysics or supernatural religions. The human predicament appeared to them clear as day. The gods, if there were gods, remained entirely unimplicated in mortal affairs. Human beings were allotted a few vanishing moments for gladness "in the coasts of light," and then, all their careless surrenders cancelled, were laid away in the sepulchres which, like so many bakers' ovens, honeycombed the sides of their winding mountain roads. How beautiful those familiar rock-strewn slopes were, balanced firm between the blue of the sky and the blue of the Mediterranean, precipitous slopes green with prosperous spurge bushes, whose yellow blossoms to sauntering twilight lovers would appear like the eyes upon the outspread tails of a hundred flaunting peacocks!

What wild imagining was it that could venture to attribute to life any other meaning than that of life? In such a privileged locality death itself lost half its terror. Gone overnight were the nervous apprehensions inherited from the Stone Ages, apprehensions that had bred in far-off days the superstitious rituals darkening the lives of the ancient inhabitants of the Greek peninsula with rites of sacrificial expiation, rites even yet lingering on in Attica. These legacies of sinister thought-infection melted away in the Cyrenaic sunshine. In an environment where the very corpses in their sandy hollows remained dry and gay it was not easy for spiritual disorders to thrive.

Aristippus brought all considerations down to practical decisions. As Timon of Athens sarcastically remarked, "Such was the delicate nature of Aristippus that he groped after error by touch." And true enough it was that the senses, the senses, the senses were his sole concern. He could never be persuaded to regard with a serious countenance the academic jargon of the schools, but confounded all doubters by boldly cutting the Gordian knot of epistemological speculation with one shrewd stroke. He agreed that the evidence of the senses could not be entirely trusted, the senses at best being irresponsible, though, this admitted, he argued that the sensations of each individual possessed a qualified validity which, combined with other processes of consciousness, afforded the best proof we could ever hope to gain of the existence of the objective world, making up also a sum of knowledge "adequate for all human purposes." "What is perceived is real"—on such a rough-and-ready axiom he set about to construct his philosophic pleasure dome. To seize with a ruthless greed upon every indulgence presented to the senses would clearly be a mistaken method of life, and one calculated to bring down upon the head a thousand distracting complications. The expediency of each action must be judged by the happiness or unhappiness that it is likely to carry in its train. For Aristippus morality was a matter of right judgments, but right judgments uninfluenced by moralic acid or theological de-

calogues. The first duty of man is to be happy himself, and when this has been achieved every soul who comes in contact with him shares the largesse of his freedom.

A peculiar radiance is given out from a delighted spirit, and this God-like lustre indicates how the demand of the ego may eventually be reconciled to the necessary exactions of society. Aristippus used to teach that it was sufficient "if we enjoy each single pleasure that is presented," and he himself indulged every luxurious whim that came into his head, and yet always studied to retain the play of his inner life uncorrupted. He remained undaunted before each vicissitude of fortune, robes or rags becoming him equally well. There was in his opinion no absolute morality. "The golden rule to remember was that there was no golden rule." Every situation in life was absolutely unique, never to be repeated again through all eternity, and for this reason must be considered entirely on its own merits. Sensitive discriminations would go far to ensure for an individual fortunate days, with a mind at peace and the carnal desires of the body satisfied.

Aristippus himself possessed that "natural superiority" which often accompanies a disregard of conventional prejudices. Cicero, recognizing his personal distinction, coupled him with Socrates, declaring that "the great and divine excellences" of the two men went far to annul their offences "against custom and tradition." "The multitude,"

Heraclitus once said, "are like people heavy with wine led by children knowing not whither they go." Aristippus valued above everything the "subjective reality" of the individual as it gradually took form under the impacts of life. He felt nothing but contempt for the banal conceptions accepted as reality by the world—false conceptions projected by commonplace minds swarming like bees on a June morning.

Aristippus was no insincere or unpractised philosopher. He was able to adapt himself to every occasion. Plato is reported to have said to him: "You alone are endowed with the gift of being at ease in circumstances of wealth as in circumstances of poverty." This faculty of affable adaptation is well illustrated by the anecdotes that have to do with his stay at the court of Dionysius of Syracuse. Though the man "of superior refinement" suffered a thousand humiliations in the proud halls of this tyrant, he preserved intact the essential integrity of his character. Diogenes, jeering from his tub at Aristippus, called him "king's poodle," but at every turn the Cyrenaic's witty quips prove that his mind suffered no degradation. Even when the tyrant spat upon him he merely remarked: "If the fishermen let themselves be drenched with sea-water in order to catch a gudgeon, ought I not to endure to be wetted with negus in order to take a blenny?"; and when Dionysius, exasperated by one of his sallies, sent him to sit at the lowest place at the table,

he was overheard saying that the tyrant " must have wished to confer distinction on the last place."

In spite of his free views, he was a man of fastidious personal habits. He felt no compunction about declaring that pleasure was *always good* even if it proceeded from the most unseemly conduct; but certainly his own behaviour was distinguished for its rational self-mastery. In his private life he appears to have been the reverse of riotous. When Dionysius, for once in a genial mood, offered him his choice of three alluring flute-girls, he took them all away with him, excusing himself by saying: " Paris paid dearly for giving the preference to one out of three "; but on reaching the door of his house he let them all go again. In his youth he was privileged to enjoy the favours of Lais, but even in such exceptional circumstances he still remained " a child of herbs and abstinences." This celebrated courtesan used to amuse herself at the expense of those who pretended to have gained a superiority over their passions. " The sages and philosophers," she lightly laughed, " are not above the rest of mankind, for I find them at my door as often as any other Athenians." Aristippus, being reproached by some grudging moralist of the day for his frequent visits to her house, replied after this fashion: " I have Lais, not she me: and it is not abstinence from pleasures that is best, but mastery over them without ever being worsted "; and again when he observed

a young man of his train—a disciple—blushing to see him enter a bawdy-house, he defended himself by remarking : “ It is not going in that is dangerous, but the not being able to go out.”

It seems he was never at a loss for a pat retort. When someone criticized him for leaving a room in the middle of an angry argument, he answered : “ Because it is your privilege to use foul language, so it is my privilege not to listen.” On his first arrival at the Sicilian palace, Dionysius, wishing to humiliate him, asked him why he, a philosopher, should have come to his court. Aristippus answered : “ When I was in need of wisdom I went to Socrates ; now that I am in need of money I come to you.” Dionysius, continuing his banter, asked him to explain how it came about that philosophers visited rich men but rich men did not visit philosophers. “ The one,” replied Aristippus, “ knows what he needs, while the other does not.” And when he was derided for accompanying a petition with prostrations at the feet of Dionysius he said : “ It is not I who am to blame, but Dionysius, who has his ears in his feet.”

On one occasion when he was sailing to Corinth a sudden storm arose, and it was observed that he displayed every sign of extreme perturbation. The seamen, noticing this, said : “ We plain men are not alarmed ; and are you philosophers, then, turned cowardly ? ” To which he coolly replied, in a style reminiscent of one of Oscar Wilde’s effronteries :

“The lives at stake in the two cases are not comparable.”

He was reckless and extravagant in his attitude to money, and once when he saw his slave overburdened with a bullion-bag he called to him to “Pour away the greater part of the coin, and carry no more than you can conveniently manage”; and many times he was heard to remark that “Riches were not like shoes which when too large cannot be used.” It was observed, however, that in the process of imparting his wisdom to his daughter Arete, he especially taught her “to despise excess.” Aristippus died in the eightieth year of his age, 356 B.C. Arete, however, instructed her son with such understanding that he was able to develop still further the philosophic system of his grandfather.

Possibly the most interesting of these later Cyrenaics was Theodorus. Diogenes Lærtius tells us that he wrote a treatise entitled *Of the Gods* which was “not contemptible.” Theodorus was a convinced pacifist. He declared himself to be a citizen of the whole world, and thought it reasonable for the good man not to risk his life in the defence of his country, “for he should never throw wisdom away to benefit the unwise.”

The exact position of Cyrene was a little to the east of Tripoli, in the vilayet of Barka, and surely the passing of the centuries does not seem to have brought any large increment of wisdom to that quarter of the world. When will men learn that

“ every violation of justice strikes at the very life of society itself and threatens the destruction of the indispensable conditions of all happiness ” ?

Many of the problems of life and death that were approached with so much spirit by these lively thinkers remain still open questions. Men, as of old, are easily betrayed by the more obvious allurements of life. They seek happiness by acquiring more riches than they can possibly use, by exercising power over others, by satisfying uncivilized personal ambitions. Scarce one in a thousand is content with the simple natural heaven-sent rewards of life. The bones of Aristippus have long since crumbled to dust. The airy breath of his wisdom remains with us. Yet how few are the fowlers, either in the Occident or in the Orient, whose nets are fine and strong enough to catch the careless seaside wind of his pure happiness :—

“ The world being fleeting, I practise naught but artifice ;
I hold only with happiness and sparkling wine ;
Forsake not the book, and the lover’s lips, and the green
bank of the field
Ere that the earth enfolds thee in its bosom.”



G. M. Powys.

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

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To the pious it has always been a stumbling-block that there should be included in the pages of the Bible such frankly hedonistic precepts as are to be found in the Book of Ecclesiastes. From the first this singular book has been subjected to manipulations at the hands of the orthodox. In many cases the subversive thoughts expressed by the Preacher have been deliberately rendered innocuous by the arbitrary insertion of conventional sentiments. The book as it was originally written was as easy to be understood by the rich as by the poor, by the educated as by the ignorant.

Professor Jastrow accomplished a notable service in sloughing off these misleading passages, thereby enabling us to read the essay as it first stood. Thus treated, the book regains the full force of its strong and simple message. If, as many of us believe, supernatural religions represent the imaginative response of a speculative animal startled out of its slow wits by the endowment of a rudimentary consciousness, then there has been provided us in these venerable pages a philosophic message as simple as the grass and as lucky.

The poetical preacher, with the design of obtaining

a better hearing, utters his wisdom under the shadow of the "Son of David King in Jerusalem," whose renown for practical wisdom had considerable prestige in the East. From so formidable a vantage point he felt no compunction about speaking boldly. All our metaphysical systems and religious faiths, each contradicting the other, have no more substance than dreams. The race of man is truly, as Homer discerned, in no way superior to the "race of leaves," a race fugitive and without signification! Many of the great sages have entertained this same conviction. Others, hesitating to sponsor so desolate a conclusion, have acquiesced in the more vaulting claims of the tribe. In every generation there are found men and women who derive spiritual refreshment from uncompromising words spoken without fear. Impatient of idealistic conceptions more easy to be believed than to be proved, they recover a lost sense of dignity from accepting life upon its lowest terms, making no more demands for transcendental intervention than does the water-rat in its aquatic domicile on the willow-herb bank of a river. Such undebauched creatures do not consider matters outside the range of their common senses:—

"They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,
They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth."

There is no good reason why we should not emulate this sublime detachment from the inactual, a detach-

ment in our case recognizing that knowledge of the Absolute is beyond man's reach. "Far off is that which exists and very deep—who can find it out?"

The author of Ecclesiastes believes that man holds no privileged place. The atomic "torrents of spring" are in no intelligent way implicated in his saucy destiny, a destiny for which no moral provision has ever been made. There is no survival of the soul after death, nor has man any pre-eminence over the beast. Such a denial is distasteful to those who have become practised in the acceptance of agreeable creeds. Even the writer of Ecclesiastes, too much influenced by the prattling of priests, does not allow his thought to sink to the lowly level where the springs of living water are to be found.

The book opens with a magnificent passage expressing the melancholy that takes possession of sensitive minds when contemplating the recurring transmutations of indestructible matter. "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose . . . All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full. . . . All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it. . . . What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever." The poet then considers the futility of trying to acquire wisdom and of accumulating stores of learning. Well has he apprehended that in Nature's prodigality the knowledge of the scholar is

scattered for ever by Death, scattered not a whit less carelessly than is the folly of the fool. "For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever: seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? As the fool."

Despite all fancies it is evident that we dance each one of us to his own predestined tune, and it is not in the power of any man or of any woman to alter the essential moulding given to them by the hand of the potter. Our fate is bound to our backs like a pilgrim's fardel. "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven. . . . A time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted . . . there is no man that hath power over the spirit to retain the spirit; neither hath he power in the day of death." The Preacher sees also that evil is more active than good and that to resist evil is to court worldly disaster, and to struggle against it is like trying to dam back a tidal river with half a dozen bundles of broken winter reeds: for in earth cruelty has always, and will always, hold empire over compassion. "So I returned, and considered all the oppressions that are done under the sun: and behold the tears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter; and on the side of their oppressors there was power; but they had no comforter."

Nor are the rewards from the possessive instincts any more reliable. Be a life never so long, an

indulgence of the acquisitive impulse inevitably ends in disillusionment. "As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand." We have, indeed, but one absolutely necessary copy-book truth to learn about earth-life—*its instability*. We frisk and feed under as stiff a discipline as Easter lambs in a butcher's paddock. There is no appeal. "For man also knoweth not his time : as the fishes that are taken in an evil net, and as the birds that are caught in the snare ; so are the sons of men snared in an evil time, when it falleth suddenly upon them." In one simple sentence does the Preacher settle the gnarled argument between the living and the dead, "A living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die ; but the dead know not anything."

He brings his practical good sense to bear upon our predicament, and concludes that a man can do nothing better than to enjoy to the full every pleasure that life has to offer. For so blithe an application three things are essential—health, work, and love, elementary requirements that must be diligently sought after. Calculations wise in counsel must be brought to bear upon all the problems of our days, and then, when an opportunity occurs and it is harmonious to do so, we should abandon ourselves utterly to the gratifications of our senses, at the same time not allowing ourselves to become the slaves

of our insatiate appetites. Life, he realizes, is very complex and often requires the reconciliation of opposites. "It is a tumultuous passage towards spiritual peace." The moth that falls scorched to death has no cause to brag. "Be not righteous over much; neither make thyself over wise: why shouldest thou destroy thyself? Be not over much wicked, neither be thou foolish: why shouldest thou die before thy time? . . . All things have I seen in the days of my vanity: there is a just man that perisheth in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man that longeth his life in his wickedness." We should be eager and alert to satisfy our desires, thereby increasing the sum tally of the world's happiness, but we should satisfy them with intelligence. It is prudent to snatch from life's well-spread tables as much as can be snatched without vexation or satiety, remembering always that the simpler our pleasures the more happy are we likely to be. "Better is an handful with quietness, than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit. . . . The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep."

As the book gathers towards its end the fervour of the prophet unites with the inspiration of the poet. The true word "was in my heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay." No longer can he suffer the young to be betrayed by the admonitions of

those who would slyly disparage the life of the senses. In every age it has been the same. Mag-nates with top-knots of almond blossom plot how best to impede the white ankles of Atalanta. Boys and girls shall be instructed in his Canticle of Scepticism. " Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth ; and let thy heart cheer thee in the days of thy youth, and walk in the ways of thine heart, and in the sight of thine eyes." If once man could be persuaded to accept what he has without neurotic evasions he could live with mirth. The plain gifts of life suffice. They alone offer us a deep and incontestable solace. Let us leave the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and gather like thoughtless children about the Tree of Life, where it grows in everlasting sunlight on its high upland lawn. Rid of illusions we shall learn then to worship as the early-morning starlings, with speckled polished backs, worship.

" Behold : that which I have seen : it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him : for it is his portion . . . this is the gift of God." The fact that all go to one place should be the clue to our conduct. With jealous eyes we should guard against every threat to our personal liberty of thought or action. Our morality should be as wayward as the wind—a matter of individual taste, of individual pride, of individual understanding. When once we are rid of our emotional tensions we shall be

in a position to entertain those unpartisan amoral judgments that can redeem each situation. Long, rich, full, and imaginative lives are required, lives that spread and burgeon and bring joy and shelter to all.

In the sonorous periods of the last great chapter of Ecclesiastes may be found the most poetical and honourable sentences in the Bible. It is as though the lot of each man and of each woman born from the womb had found in this dirge its adequate celebration.

“ In the days when the keepers of the house shall tremble . . . and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail.” It is interesting to learn that the Rabbinical commentators were accustomed to interpret the allusion to the grasshopper as a direct reference to the masculine organ of carnal desire. And truly it is this very “ grasshopper ” that animates all life. Here is the solid tap-root of our airy transports, and without its vigour even mystical visions would vanish away. This narwhal’s horn, with its unceasing life-long sea-shell murmurings of the far-off orchards of Cathay, may verily be said to be our ankh, the emblem of all our joy. It is a divining rod that never fails. It is an enchanter’s wand that can transmute the dullest dust into shining sun-motes of purest gold. When its spell is upon us we sleep light, live light, and tread on the grass of familiar honeysuckle lanes as though under a

glamour. Wherever there is living existence the spirit of Love is present, and wherever Love is present moments of happiness are possible.

“ Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.”



G. M. Powys.

LUCRETII

LUCRETIOUS

No great poet more nobly represents the mutinous Promethean theomachy than does Lucretius. For two thousand years his passionate sincerity has roused men out of their servile sloth. His philosophy—so simple, so deep—transvalues values. It frees men from uneasy fears and makes it possible for them “to contemplate all things with a mind at rest.” For the human race has not raised itself out of the earth’s heavy clay clear-eyed. From the first its power of reasoning was rendered infirm by atavistic animal mistrusts, and few of us may be said to have retained an heroic vision “beneath the gliding stars.”

Poetry is a heightened awareness of existence, an intensity of conscious emotion, an intensity of conscious thought. The perceptions of Lucretius were so vibrant that his poem still trembles with life, and the “lasting loveliness” of his words comes straight down to us from his living lips.

It is remarkable how few didactic poems are entirely free from the taint of theological subservience. Of these *De Rerum Natura* was the first and still remains the greatest. With what a splendour of indignation this great liberator of the

human race regarded religion, and with what dauntless *virtu* his strong soul entered each gloomy cave of superstition to overthrow it "from top to bottom." He is the dauntless champion of the earthborn, and he does not hesitate to raise his mortal head to outstare those two mighty intimidators—God and Death.

In astronomy, in anthropology, in psychology, and in physics, he hints at, even anticipates, the conclusions of modern scientific research. The whole riot of earth existence was perceived by him under the bright light of poetic inspiration. No other writer can so stir us into realizing how valiant it is possible for our souls to be. He brings a new confidence to our faltering spirits, and, upon eagle's wings, carries us up towards the life-giving sun.

"For not only would all reasoning fall away, life itself too would collapse, unless you chose to trust the senses." His concern is to rid human beings of their most enervating weakness—fear. He would have us no longer look askance at the Heavens. The Gods who dwell in the "interspaces between the worlds . . . where falls not hail, or rain, or any snow, nor ever wind blows loudly," are careless of mankind. They have nothing to do with what is happening upon earth. All comes about through the agency of natural laws. "Nothing is ever begotten of nothing by divine will. . . . And if you learn this surely, and cling to it, Nature is seen, free at once, and quit of

her proud rulers, doing all things of her own accord alone, without control of Gods."

In accordance with the theory of his master Epicurus, he explains that the ultimate substance of the physical universe is composed of atoms, which, obedient to natural laws, by the force of clash and collision come together in *nebulæ*, and finally build up the universe with its suns and planets. "For all the nature of the first bodies lies far away from our senses below their purview." Nature herself then is seen to be the creator. She it is who, acting by law but without moral purpose, "brings forth the fragile things into the coasts of light."

The soul is but a corporeal aggregate of refined atoms which at death are dissipated for ever, along with the rougher atoms of the body. Thus men have nothing to fear from the Gods either in life or after death. "What once sprung from earth sinks back into the earth."

But if we are in the grip of the inevitable movements of atomic matter, then all must be determined, and this in the opinion of Epicurus would be a worse tyranny than the tyranny of religion. His theory of the "swerve of the atoms" saves us from this trap. It is an hypothesis which in our own day has been revived in a disguised form. The quantum theory has been of the greatest convenience to pious men of science on the look-out for mouse-hole God-cracks in the floor of matter. "By swerving do the

first beginnings make a certain start of movement to break through the decrees of fate so that cause may not follow cause from infinite time."

Surely, for a living organism, annihilation is the most desperate contingency. The very rats in our cellars shrink from it. Lucretius teaches that, once relieved of the fear of punishment hereafter, we should be able to face the inevitable with philosophic calm. "Death, then, is naught to us, nor does it concern us a whit, inasmuch as the nature of the mind is but a mortal possession." Finally, with contemptuous impatience, he rebukes us for our panic misgivings. "Epicurus himself died, who surpassed the race of men in understanding and quenched the light of all, even as the sun rising in the sky quenches the stars. Wilt thou then hesitate and chafe to meet thy doom? thou whose life is well-nigh dead while thou still livest and lookest on the light, who dost waste in sleep the greater part of thy years, and snore when wide awake."

What, then, should be the moral aim of our lives during the years allowed us? Lucretius answers that the true end of life should be personal happiness. Our senses are eager to instruct us how this difficult state is to be won. Physical pain and spiritual conflict disrupt the harmony of soul and body. Such disturbances are to be avoided by setting limits to our desires and fears, and by knowing "what can be done and what cannot." We must minister to the needs and desires of the body, but

always within reason, and must preserve the balance of our souls by evading "the gloomy billows of care." When once a fortunate equilibrium has been achieved, then a natural happiness will become habitual to us.

We must protect ourselves against the more dangerous passions, against avarice, against ambition, and against love. We must grasp the essential facts of life, and, understanding what are the "limits of possession," accommodate ourselves as best we may to the human predicament. "It is far better to obey in peace than to long to rule the world with kingly power and to sway kingdoms." By a blessed dispensation what is necessary to sustain life is cheap and easy to procure—bread, cheese, vegetables, water, and "the poor man's plaid." It is the luxuries that are rare and expensive.

Passionate love remains for mortals an ambiguous pleasaunce; even in its most harmonious moments it is our destiny, as we lie enmeshed in this golden net, still to be tortured by unsatisfied yearnings. "But from the face and beauteous bloom of men nothing passes into the body to be enjoyed save delicate images. . . . Even at last when lovers embrace and taste the flower of their years, eagerly they clasp and kiss, and pressing lip on lip, breathe deeply; yet all for naught, since they cannot tear off aught else, nor enter in and pass away, merging the whole body in the other's frame."

When love is unrequited or frustrated, there are

ills that may be detected even with "closed eyes." She has thrown out some word "and left its sense in doubt, and it is planted deep in the passionate heart and becomes alive like a flame." Lucretius considers nothing more dangerous to happiness than this kind of love that ravishes a man or woman down to the very grass. "Nor is he who shuns love bereft of the fruits of Venus, but rather he chooses those joys which bring no pain."

The true beauty and power of the poem, however, do not lie in these cunning reservations, but rather in his broad survey of life. Though his method is scientific, it is the imaginative rapture of Lucretius, his religious awe before the creative energy of Nature, that gives the work its prophetic power. The whole of existence is seen by him as a kind of epic ballad. From the gravitational stir of primal atoms creating worlds out of the matrix of chaos, to the lowly beasts of the field leaping quick from the "earth's wombs," all is impregnated with poetry.

Even in the light of our present-day knowledge it would be difficult to outline man's early development with more insight than does Lucretius, with more insight and with more imagination :—

"And during many lustres of the sun rolling through the sky they prolonged their lives after the roving manner of wild beasts . . . what sun and rains had brought to birth, what earth had created unasked, such gift was enough to appease their hearts . . . and like bristly boars these woodland men would lay their limbs

naked on the ground . . . nor could they look to the common weal, nor had they knowledge to make mutual use of any customs or laws. . . . Yet never were many thousands of men led beneath standards and done to death in a single day. . . . Then after they got themselves huts and skins and fire . . . so hatred for their acorns set in and old couches strewn with grass and filled with leaves were desolate . . . then first the race of men began to soften. For fire brought it about that their chilly limbs could not now so well bear cold under the roof of heaven, and Venus lessened their strength, and children, by their winning ways, easily broke down the haughty will of their parents. . . . Lastly thereafter property was invented and gold found which easily robbed the strong and beautiful of honour. . . . For the race of men, worn out with leading a life of violence, lay faint from its feuds; wherefore the more easily of its own will it gave in to ordinances and the close mesh of laws. . . . Next, what cause spread abroad the divine powers of the Gods among great nations, and filled cities with altars, and taught men to understand sacred rites at yearly festivals, rites which are honoured to-day in great empires and at great places; whence even now there is implanted in mortals a shuddering dread, which raises new shrines of gods over all the world, and constrains men to throng them on holy days; of all this it is not heard to give account in words."

He calls to men to abjure cowardice and lifting up their heads, to accept their free inheritance with unvanquished hearts, like gods.



G. M. Powys.

LUCIAN

LUCIAN

IN these days when philosophic opinions sharply conflict, and some declare that we live in a universe subject to scientific research, while others assert that the physical world testifies to the truth of our supernatural creeds, we may well derive profit from re-reading the works of Lucian. In the second century of our era the religious conclusions of the civilized world were just as uncertain as are our own. Few educated people believed in the existence of the old pagan gods. Christianity had not yet had time to show the power of its appeal. The moral exhortations of the wisest teachers were seldom to be reconciled with their personal conduct, and false prophets, like the notorious Alexander, were as ready as those of to-day to batten upon the ignorance and credulity of the populace.

Lucian was born at Samosata in the province of Babylon in A.D. 125. As a young man he travelled to Egypt and other centres of religious life. He was for a period in Rome, and afterwards spent ten years as a lecturer in Gaul. In his later life he resided in Athens, a favoured man of letters, eventually being rewarded by the Emperor Severus with a sinecure appointment as secretary to the Prefect of Egypt. His

works—and he was a generous author—are written in pure Attic Greek. The Christians circulated a legend that in his old age he was devoured by dogs, but, although the date and manner of his death are unknown, we have no reason to believe this piece of malicious tittle-tattle.

Lucian's mind was essentially civilized. He was interested in every aspect of human life, examining all that came to his attention with an alert and tolerant intelligence.

His life was separated from the life of Jesus by approximately the same number of years as ours is from the life, let us say, of Lord Byron, and when this fact is appreciated, the casual references to Christianity that this scoffer makes have a singular interest. For example, what a shock of contemporaneous authenticity purged of cant comes to us when, in speaking of the Christians, he refers to Jesus as their "crucified sophist"; and again, there is something deeply moving in his application of the epithet "great" to Christ when we recollect that it is from the mouth of a man of the world whose unemotional disposition was incapable of understanding either poetry or passion. "You know they [the Christians] still reverence that great man, him who was crucified in Palestine for introducing these new doctrines into the world."

His relationship with Proteus, the Christian apostate, must have given him an opportunity for investigating the subtleties of this new creed. He

travelled back to Athens with this strange man, notable for burning himself alive. On their arrival in the city Peregrinus Proteus had it publicly announced that he intended to practise the rite of self-cremation. He then had an enormous pyre prepared in front of the Hippodrome, and after the games were over walked boldly towards it wearing the dress of a cynic. His friends did what they could to dissuade him from his purpose, but his enemies kept urging him to keep his promise. Sprinkling the brushwood with frankincense, he deliberately entered the flames, uttering as he did so certain words of mystical implication.

A scene of this kind was exactly calculated to exasperate Lucian, and after the spectacular performance was over he walked back to the city spreading a report that he himself had seen a vulture leave the fire and fly towards the sun. This playful invention, he noted, was soon circulating as an authenticated fact. Lucian found it difficult to account for his friend's extraordinary conduct. Eventually, after his cynical manner, he attributed it to a love of notoriety, a judgment hardly in accord with the mystical passion of the man's last words.

To an intellect dominated by logic, emotional feeling or emotional action must have its origin either in insincerity or in insanity. It was, indeed, incidents of this kind that confirmed Lucian's conviction as to the irremediable folly of the human

race. Wherever he went he saw people acting in a manner that seemed to him little short of imbecile. In Egypt he observed them worshipping cats, monkeys, water-jugs, and was amazed beyond all measure by the outcry and wailing that went up over the death of Apis, the common town bull !

Lucian, in fact, had reached that enviable philosophic state which enables a man to survey the human scene with unimplicated detachment. Profoundly disillusioned, he considered human life of too short duration for anybody to hope to understand its deeper secrets, and consequently he advised men to cultivate their gardens and fulfil as best they might the simple duties of citizenship.

Nothing diverted him more than to elaborate upon any scrap of legendary hearsay that seemed to render the gods ludicrous. He especially relished comic stories about them, and was never tired of referring to the trick Prometheus played upon the President of the Immortals when at table he served him with the worst pieces of the joint, pieces little better than bare bones and gristle, covered up in "shining fat." The floor of heaven he describes as adjusted with round apertures fitted with lids, "like the coverings of wells." At certain set times Jupiter listens to the human prayers that come floating up through these apertures, comfortably settling himself upon each golden throne, placed by the side of the holes for his convenience. He hears "One sailor praying for a north wind, another for a

south wind : the farmer for rain, and the fuller for sunshine."

For all his worldliness, Lucian had a moral austerity. This is clearly revealed in his description of the miseries and humiliations attendant upon the life of a sycophant, upon the lives of upper servants, companions, and tutors, people who, for the sake of a soft livelihood, must of necessity suffer the most galling personal indignities. "I had rather," he cries, "for my part, have an onion and some salt, and be allowed to cut it when and how I please. . . . Is there no pulse still growing, no wholesome herbs on which a man may sustain life, no streams of pure water left, that you should be driven to this direst strait for existence? "

He is of opinion that the majority of men are doomed to live upon trust, that the gods want prayers and not philosophy, and that in reality everything goes with wind and tide and "as chance may waft it." He is at pains to warn men against too confident a dependence upon sexual gratifications, upon that "tree of perpetual thirst, whose flowers are many strange desires." Speaking as one who possesses the tranquil mind of a philosopher, he boldly reminds us that it is not everybody "who is maddened by the sound of the Phrygian flute." In truth he girds at those who are, as being for the most part "very bunglers in sensuality, who know not the laws, and confound her ordinances, flinging down their souls to be trampled beneath the heels of luxury."

All life to Lucian was a pageant of folly, a kind of Shrove Tuesday pancake carnival, each man, each woman, an inconsequent puppet held up by a transparent little cobweb from Fate's spindle, and zealous to ruin their hazardous unreturning moments by desires, by ambitions, and by lust for gold—"an object of sallow complexion, and of a burdensome weight." He meets an official preening himself in his smart uniform and, taking him by the sleeve, gravely reminds him that his attire "did not make its original wearer anything but a sheep." He is convinced that Jupiter's preoccupation with mankind does not extend so far as "to sift the good from the bad," and that his worshippers go about over the face of the earth, their ears bunged up with that most superlative wax, the substance of which is ignorance and deceit. He is never tired of admonishing his readers to live with understanding—to live, that is to say, with the knowledge of death before their eyes. "A very short survey of life has convinced me of the absurdity, and meanness and insecurity, that pervades all human objects such as wealth, office, power. . . . If only men would start with a clear understanding that they are mortal, that after a brief sojourn on the earth they will wake from the dream of life, and leave all behind them—they would live more sensibly, and not mind dying so much."

Yet the description he gives us of the other world is hardly encouraging. He envisages it as a place

of monotony where there is neither strength nor beauty, where one is no better than another, "all under the same gloom." He can make us laugh by his tale of the dead tyrant's escape and how he almost got back to earth, but it is not reassuring to learn that a couch in a girl's bower can be summoned to give evidence at the final judgment seat !

We see them, these troops of the departed, with their "strengthless heads," being hustled along like so many goats, and when, with Lucian, we have made ourselves merry at their expense, we find that the wisest of all these dead men's utterances is upon the lips of an aged fisherman. Here we come upon words of simple truth, an answer to man and an answer to God, natural and not to be gainsaid. Diogenes notices him amongst the shades, and is surprised to observe that although apparently the oldest of them all, he yet wears a dolorous countenance. The dialogue is as follows :—

Diogenes : I must interrogate this most reverend senior of them all—Sir, why weep, seeing you have died full of years? . . . I see you were wealthy, and do not like leaving your boundless luxury to die.

Pauper : You are quite mistaken, I was near ninety, made a miserable livelihood out of my line and rod, was excessively poor, childless, a cripple, and had nearly lost my sight.

Diogenes : And you still wished to live?

Pauper : Aye ; sweet is the light and dread is death ; would that one might escape it.



G. M. Powys.

JULIAN THE APOSTATE

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JULIAN the Apostate has always been a baffling figure to historians, both Christian and secular, a paradoxical figure, noble and ignoble, rational and irrational. He was what we would now describe as "a character"—a cow with a crumpled horn, a lion disguised as an ass. In some ways he was singularly unfitted for the task he undertook—the task of withstanding that baleful "epidemic of unreason" which in due course became responsible for the Dark Ages.

Julian throughout his life may be said to have remained "a spoilt priest," no amount of oblations by means of the *taurobolium* being found sufficient to wash the lustral waters of Christian baptism from his brow or the aroma of the sacramental Christian wine from his golden goat's beard. He was possessed by a sense of mysticism akin to what Christians profess to feel. Nobody could have been farther from the classical state of innocent life-acceptance. He was grossly superstitious, and, despite his adoration of King Helios, ill at ease in the sun's solid domain of earth-reality. He was attracted to all those mock forms of spiritualism that throughout the centuries have given consolation to men. It was this same

infirmity of mind that prompted him to rejoice at the destruction of the works of Epicurus, and that rendered his excitable strivings against the neurosis which had already obtained so insidious a hold over the senile Roman Empire not altogether satisfactory.

I was once talking to my brother John, who has always thought it safe for us to put our faith in the supernatural. I remarked that I could never, in any circumstances, believe in God, seeing that so many horrible cruelties took place about me every hour of the day. To my surprise, he responded to my words with a show of genuine enthusiasm, revealing, however, by what he said the indurated theurgic temper of his mind. "I feel," he exclaimed, "exactly as you do, but it is not the slightest use declaring yourself to be an Atheist. If you really wish to annoy God, you must be a Polytheist. God's prevailing emotion has always been jealousy, and the mere whisper of the suspicion that there might exist other deities than himself throws him into a towering passion." If we should subscribe to this view, Julian must most certainly have exasperated the Almighty; for, although he confined his personal applause to Apollo, Hermes, and Pallas Athene, he would not willingly have had the altars of any semi-demi pagan deity neglected. Indeed, so energetic was he in offering bloody sacrifices that he earned for himself the nickname of "The Slaughterer," and upon his setting out for Persia, the young men did not hesitate to buzz after

him this quip : “ The white cattle to Cæsar, greeting. If you conquer there is an end of us.”

Just as certain human beings shiver at the sight of cats, so there have always been those who cannot abide Christians.

“ The only man that I ever knew
Who did not make me almost spew
Was Fuseli : he was both Turk and Jew.
And so, dear Christian friends, How do you do ? ”

Julian's antipathy was empiric and congenital. The Christ party had murdered his father and his eldest brother ; but, apart from any resentment on this score, he felt the utmost contempt for a religion which divided its worship between an anthropomorphic deity, “ arbitrary and capricious,” and a dead Jew.

The more he had to do with the Christians the more obnoxious they became to him, with their unseemly rivalries and endless doctrinal wrangles. “ Hear me,” he cried at one of the synods when his rational arguments were well-nigh drowned by their high-pitched, angry voices. “ The Franks heard me, the Allemanni heard me ! ” Their morbid preoccupation with churchyard bones was especially distasteful to him. With a considerable show of reason, the philosophic Emperor declared this peculiar predilection to be in no way justified by the evidence of the New Testament. “ Let the dead bury their dead ” had been the words of Jesus, and

whitewashed sepulchres in the valley of Jehoshophat were used by him as symbols of corruption. The Christians, Julian affirmed, were disposed to reject all Jewish ritual that interfered with the appetites. "They took to themselves the licence to eat what they wished, and never feared defilement." They combined, so he asserted, "Jewish sauciness" with an unpleasant kind of prurient purity.

Julian's attitude to the Jews was an odd one. It is supposed he favoured their fads in order to spite the Christians! Probably he encouraged the abortive attempt to rebuild Solomon's Temple for some such reason, but this in no way meant that he was averse to exercising his wit upon the "indistinct ravings" to be found in their sacred books. He clearly noted every eccentricity of their Jehovah, pointing out that his idea of government was an emotional rather than a rational one—a matter of rewards and reprisals rather than of impartial judgments. Also, in sharp contrast with what might have been anticipated from the first civilized resident of Paris, Julian pertly inquired how it came about that God should form a woman as a helpmate to man, knowing well that she would be the cause of Adam's fall, and that her sex from age to age would be little else than a flickering torment to the sons of men. He could not believe that any large-hearted, generous deity would be content to squander "all his favours on one little race in one little corner of the world to the neglect of the rest of mankind." The Decalogue he dubs as un-

original, and comments on the folly of the Tower of Babel story, asserting that all the clay of the world would not supply enough bricks to reach up to the lowest horn of the crescent moon. He despised the New Testament for quite other reasons. He did not attack the miracles of Jesus for being unreliable fabrications of a crafty and ambitious priesthood, but rather as being themselves mean and paltry prodigies.

There is an essential simplicity in Julian's nature that is pleasing. The devotion he felt for his mother, the Lady Basilina, "withdrawn in the bloom of youth by the motherless maiden Goddess," is touching, and so is his affection for his hereditary country home in Bithynia, grown over with "bindweed, thyme, meadow grass, and orchards," and rendered cool by innumerable fresh springs of water. His loyalty to his dissolute half-brother Gallus is remarkable when we consider how natural it would have been for boys of such different tastes, shut up together in a lonely Cappadocian Castle, to quarrel. "The Gods preserved him from being corrupted by leading him to philosophy," wrote one historian.

When eventually, at the age of twenty-five, he was summoned by his cousin Constantius to share with him the imperial purple, how characteristic it was that he should have been overheard invoking the name of Plato when trying to learn a wearisome military drill. Truly he was a strange mixture—a pseudo man-of-letters, a pseudo metaphysician, a

pseudo soldier who would regularly burn the midnight oil over his literary essays no matter how hazardous the campaign. He was dominated by two authentic passions—an overwhelming admiration for the classical past and an overwhelming desire for fame. It was the strength of the latter emotion that explains, if it does not justify, the less worthy episodes of his life—such, for instance, as his composition of insincere orations to Eusebia and Constantius, as well as the alacrity with which he accommodated himself to the exactions of the Imperial position. Julian's values, however, would never have been found but on a high plane, "the last infirmity of a noble mind," whereas his philosophic monitors, such as Maximus of Ephesus, at the first jump of his success wished plain living to the devil and came scrambling through the buttery hatch of his young master's palace. The Emperor's stern asceticism is a matter for astonishment, and it is apparently impossible for him to be budged from the narrow path of personal abstinence. As Gibbon remarked, no frightened and tender-eyed female captive was ever conducted to his tent. Nor was he less exacting over the pleasures of the table. While in the north, he refused to receive pheasants into his larder on the ground of their being a meat too hot and luxurious, while in his last campaign under a burning desert sun he was content to subsist on a little "thin broth."

Small wonder that the voluptuous inhabitants of

Antioch, given over to every kind of indulgence, disliked him; and how in keeping it was with the spirit of Julian to answer their impertinences with a literary essay packed close with humorous sallies against himself. The supercilious manners and fanciful foibles favoured by high society never appealed to the philosophic Emperor, and an un-gainliness in his personal deportment would not in any case have allowed him to compete with those people whose accomplishments he despised. He was at home in the dim caves of Mithras or by the high altar of some Greek deity. He felt at ease with the rude, rough rank-and-file of his soldiery, but disliked his ornamental body-guard sent to him by Constantius—"men good for little else but praying." It is significant that he selected for his Imperial Crown a severe "military collar."

He is said to have declared that he never regretted any act of generosity. In his administration he was consistently tolerant. Christians dolefully complained that he studied to deprive them "of the glory of Martyrdom." It is true that when George, the rascally Archbishop of Alexandria, was lynched by the pagan mob, who in a mood of brutal and contemptuous ribaldry bound his corpse to a camel's arse, Julian rebuked the rioters with words only, excusing their excesses on the score of provocation.

This George of Cappadocia had raised himself to his exalted position by cringing and craft, and it was

only after his death that he "assumed the mask of a martyr, a saint, and a Christian hero," so that the far-famed titular saint of England was in actual origin nothing better than a dishonourable bacon contractor. Julian's general attitude to the Christians, "that miserable parcel of fanatics," is clearly revealed in the following instructions sent out to the governors of the provinces: "In the name of the Gods, I do not desire the Galileans to be killed or beaten contrary to justice, or that they suffer any other evil, but I emphatically assert that God-fearing persons are to receive greater honour; for it is through the Galilean folly that all things have been well-nigh overturned." To which St. Athanasius retorted with a confidence, alas, only too well justified: "Let us retire. It is but a small cloud that will soon pass away." Julian once expressed a wish "that all the new doctrines were embodied in Athanasius, so that they might be crushed at one blow." Too clearly he saw the crepuscular fog of superstition that would gather over Europe if the machinations of the Galileans were successful. He urged the Alexandrians to keep clear heads and to reject Christianity out of hand, reminding them of "the ancient lordship over Israel."

The Christian bishops had acquired free passes for travelling along his great Imperial trunk roads. These privileges Julian cancelled, and he also forbade Christians to teach the classics in the schools, suggesting that it would be more seemly for them to

concentrate their attention upon their own outstanding works—the Gospels of St. Matthew and St. Luke! Gibbon says of Julian: “His pity was degraded by contempt; his contempt was embittered by hatred.” He surely could not abide Christian fooling in any of its manifold forms. It was as unpleasing to him as beer, which he regarded as a heady beverage not to be compared with the pure wines of Dionysos. Possibly the edict most resented by the Christians was his insistence upon their adopting the name of Galileans in all official dealings. To a sect that aspired to become a universal religion, this title, with its provincial connotation, was humiliating; for, as Mr. Martin, the former devout believer of Oriel College, Oxford, is eager to remind us in his book, a summary of the Christian prospects can be found “in a simple historic statement—the Creed.”

Certainly there is an incorrigible mental infantilism about the thinking of Julian’s pious opponents unto this day. They have even attempted to discredit the notable words of this “last of the Romans” as, at the early age of thirty-two, he lay dying by the strong-flowing River Tigris: “I die without remorse, as I lived without guilt. . . . Detesting the corrupt and destructive maxims of despotism, I have considered the happiness of the people as the end of government. . . . I now offer my tribute of gratitude to the Eternal Being, who has not suffered me to perish by the cruelty of a

tyrant, by the secret dagger of conspiracy, or by the slow tortures of lingering disease. He has given me, in the midst of an honourable career, a splendid and glorious departure from this world; and I hold it equally absurd, equally base, to solicit or to decline the stroke of fate." These inspiring words of the "Good King and mighty warrior" won from the lips of the most enlightened Christian of our times the following disparaging observation: "In the insensibility of conscience, in their ignorance of the very idea of sin . . . we recognize the mere philosopher." That one + one equals guilt has ever been typical of the Christian mind. Indeed, it is from such spiritual disorders that the nervous religion draws its nourishment, just as exotic toadstools in an overshadowed wood draw their prosperity from pieces of buried timber lying in an obscure state of corruption *under ground*. What Heraclitus said years ago of the followers of the mystery religions of his time is not inapplicable to our own tribes of mischievous pretenders: "When defiled they purify themselves with blood, just as if one who had stepped in mud were to wash himself in mud." These frenzied idolaters have always practised magical rites of a kind far too sophisticated ever to have been acceptable to the imagination of the heroic poet whom they so fondly claim to have been the Son of God.



G. M. Powys.

OMAR KHAYYAM

OMAR KHAYYÁM

WHEN I was journeying to Palestine I visited the ruins of Pompeiopolis. This city, which is situated in Asia Minor, not so very far from Anthony and Cleopatra's romantic stream, was destroyed by Tigranes in the year 56 B.C. It stands to-day desolate, its huge classical columns lying where they fell two thousand years ago, its streets overgrown with flowering myrtle, and the avenue of its amphitheatre yellow with fleabane. As I made my way through the ruins, so blandly resigned in the sunshine, a heron rose suddenly into the sky. She had been fishing from the lowest step of a flight of stone stairs against which the waters of the Mediterranean, blue even to the drops falling from a splashing oar, were gently lapping. Although so far from Persia the most inspired tetrastich of Fitzgerald's "*Rubáiyát*" immediately came into my head.

" They say the Lion and the Lizard keep
The Courts where Jamshýd gloried and drank deep :
And Bahram, that great Hunter—the Wild Ass
Stamps o'er his Head, but cannot break his Sleep."

In oriental countries that transmutation of matter,

to which all upon the earth is subject, seems to be presented more dramatically than in the better-organized countries to which we are accustomed. "All things flow away, nothing remains." We give lip service to words of this kind, and yet most of us require such startling object lessons as are everywhere provided in the East, where the litter of the centuries remains permanently conspicuous, before ever we can get this view of life firmly lodged in our heads.

Nishapour, the ancient natal town of Omar Khayyám, is the very spot for such instruction. *Nishapour* means "City of the Aryans," a fact indicating that it was one of the first settlements of the invading prehistoric Lords from the Steppes. The celebrated astronomer knew Nishapour in its glory, and throughout his life it remained a city of pride, the "most myghty carbuncle" of the Province of Khorasan. At the beginning of the thirteenth century Ghengiz Khan and his Tartar soldiery took it and sacked it in so terrible a manner that, in spite of its strategic position on the caravan route between Persia and India, it never recovered its early importance. To-day it is a comparatively insignificant eastern township built of unburnt bricks and surrounded by a vast acreage of ruins out of the past.

Omar Khayyám lived during the decades of the conquest of England by the Normans. Nishapour was then in the heyday of its prosperity, its popula-

tion at the lowest computation numbering one hundred thousand souls.

It was here that, contenting himself with a pension of one thousand two hundred mithicals of gold a year, a sum approximating to six hundred pounds sterling with us, he lived at ease under the protection of his generous patron; and even when his wise friend, the celebrated statesman, Massan Tousi, as an old man fell a victim to the knife of the first of the "assassins," he still managed until his death in 1123 to avoid personal molestation.

Scholars are of the opinion that he composed his celebrated poem at intervals throughout his life, a *rubáiyát* or quatrain being regarded in Persian literature as a completed isolated unit, as it were a single jewel, a turquoise let us say, from the mines on the hillside above Nishapour to be polished and repolished, for its own signal beauty, before being strung with others into a necklace of great price. Omar Khayyám is reputed to have been an eager student of the Greek classics, and, as was the case with the author of Ecclesiastes a thousand years earlier, seems to have given especial attention to the more wayward Greek thinkers. "How long, how long, the Philosophy of the Greeks? Study also the Philosophy of the true Faith!" one of his devouter contemporaries is said to have cried out to him. There exists other evidence to show that he was regarded with suspicion by the stricter

Mohammedans ! Indeed, one doctor of the Koran does not hesitate to call him " an unhappy philosopher, atheist, and materialist " !

Omar Khayyám is believed at one time to have made a journey to Mecca, and to have returned—so at least is suggested by Mr. John Payne, a rather contentious critic of the last century—with more sympathy for the Vedantic learning than for the fables of Islam, substituting the Hindoo metaphysic and their notion of universal oneness for the cat and dog, good and evil simplicities of the easier faith. Perhaps his contact with the philosophic casuistry of India may explain the pessimistic trend detracting from the power of his famous poem. The mood of Omar Khayyám is always far from that of blithe Dionysos. He celebrates Love and Wine as a man who despairs of finding a more elevated meaning to life. It is in truth with unmistakable reluctance that he rejects the intellect " haunting the path of happiness." In a flash it had been suddenly revealed to him that human transcendental speculation was unreliable from top to bottom.

" Why, all the Saints and Sages who discuss'd
Of the Two Worlds so learnedly, are thrust
Like foolish Prophets forth ; their Words to Scorn
Are scatter'd, and their Mouths are stopt with Dust."

The old mathematician may have been able to write a learned treatise on algebra, and present with propriety the new calendar of Jeláleddin which, as

Gibbon affirms, "surpasses the Julian and approaches the accuracy of the Gregorian style," but for all this his mind was not firm enough to sustain the decline and fall of cherished human illusions. To view theological dogmas as "agreed upon fables," and yet to praise life without reservations was beyond his pluck. Many of his verses reveal his bitter repudiation of the terms upon which all animal creation accepts and welcomes life.

"What, without asking, hither hurried *Whence* ?
And, without asking *Whither* hurried hence !
Oh ! many a Cup of his forbidden Wine
Must drown the memory of that insolence ! "

How was it that this indulged philosopher demanded so much ? His lot was a fortunate one. He was too wise to be taken in by the ordinary baits which ruin the lives of most human beings, baits which catch men and women as neatly as roach are hooked with balls of dough mixed with cotton wool ! He was not avaricious, he was not ambitious. He owned sufficient practical sagacity to constrain him ; "for prudential motives," to bridle his tongue, so that he was in little danger of having it pulled out from the back of his heretical head, as was done to the jesting victim of Jamá lu'l-Mulk who had been rash enough to let fly a quip at the respected Nidhan-ül-Mulk ! He had a mind free from moral inhibitions, while he was gifted with the awareness of the passing moment that admitted him to the

heightened experiences belonging to the life of a poet. And yet even so he was not satisfied to take the cash and let the credit go, as he bragged. See what enviable days the rogue lived snug as a maggot in an apple, under the benevolent eye of a Vizier of the widest culture, the founder of colleges in Baghdad, the author of the classic, *Treatise and Art of Government*, and, so it is reported, the inventor of the present Persian method of keeping accounts ! And what luck to have been alive in the reigns of the two best Seljúq Sultans ! He first had for a sovereign Alp Arslán, a great bestower of pensions at the Feast of Ramadán, a man of remarkable stature tall as a date-palm, and with moustaches so long " that he was compelled to tie up their ends when he wished to shoot " : he was the great warrior who, with fifteen thousand men, defeated the Byzantine Emperor with his army of two hundred thousand picked soldiers, only to meet his ill-fated accidental death on Christmas Day 1072.

" Thou hast seen Alp Arslán's head in pride exalted to the sky ;

Come to Merv, and see how lowly in the dust that head doth lie."

His son Maliksháh, who succeeded him, might equally well have been called " conquering lion," though he was distinguished still more for his enlightened rule, as is shown by his establishment of Omar Khayyám's observatory, and by the fact that he had wells dug along the highways used by pilgrims. He, like his

father, prided himself on his archery, delighting in the chase, and yet he was sensitive enough to feel uneasy in his conscience about his wholesale blood-sports, saying on one occasion, " I fear God Almighty, for what right had I to destroy the lives of these animals without necessity or need of them for food? " Cherished by such great rulers, had Omar any good cause or justification for complaint?

" Oh, Thou, who Man of baser Earth didst make,
And ev'n with Paradise devise the Snake :
For all the Sin wherewith the Face of Man
Is blacken'd—Man's forgiveness give—and take ! "

His native city enjoys a climate almost unmatched in Persia ; in the time of Omar, Nishapour, occupying a space four miles square, was in very truth a garden city ! The streets in the long soft twilights, and under the large honey-coloured Asiatic moons, smelt of the scents of roses ; the oriental breezes lightly lifting the fragrant burdens of a thousand closed-in gardens where every portico contained a lover " resting in his sweetheart's arms," and all night long the splashing from the cisterns continued the monotonous murmuring sound of water falling upon stone.

The poets of Persia are never tired of praising Nishapour. One of them named Katibi describes himself as coming " like attar, from the Rose-land of Nishapour " ; and declares, " If Paradise is to be found on the face of the earth, it is in Nishapour ; if not there, it exists not." Even to-day, nourished

by small rains, the neighbourhood of the town for a wide circuit is thick-grown with lemon and orange orchards. It is said that a traveller may ride out of the city along the beautiful valley of Meshad and always be in the shade. The mountains, because of their extreme fertility, are green, cultivated to their very summits. Date palms, almond trees, and fig trees grow everywhere, and from the tops of the walls melons hang burgeoning in the sun. Anyone up betimes is rewarded by an inconceivable freshness. The streets of the bazaars give out the odour of the stamped and perfumed saddlery so highly prized by mediæval horsemen; while in the fields lilies of the valley grow thick as garlic, and the chattering calls from the sand-grouse rise from the dew. Omar Khayyám knew well such lovely places of freedom, knew, none better, the same sensation of spiritual release that comes to us in England when, after suffering some irksome social discipline, we escape to the open highway, seeking refuge on a waste patch like any tramp who invites his soul with crooked knee, at liberty and couched in dust and camomile.

“ Well, let it take them ! What have we to do
With Kaikobád the great, or Kaikhosrú ?
Let Zál and Rustum bluster as they will,
Or Hatim call to supper—heed not you.

With me along the strip of Herbage strown
That just divides the desert from the sown,
Where name of Slave and Sultan is forgot
And Peace to Mahmúd on his golden Throne ! ”

There is a story of an interview between Tamerlane and the poet Hafiz. On entering the city Shiraz, Tamerlane summoned the poet. The Conqueror came fresh from his favourite pastime of building pyramids of skulls, on this occasion a pyramid made up of seventy thousand skulls belonging to the human beings whom he had slaughtered in revenge for the deaths of a few dozen of his testy Tartars ! To the poet he quoted the poet's own lines

“ If that unkindly Shiraz Turk would take my heart within
her hand,
I'd give Bukhárá for the mole upon her cheek or
Samarquand ! ”

He asked him brusquely what he meant by estimating the value of these cities so cheap when he, Tamerlane, had laboured and sweated to subdue them. Hafiz, intimidated, bowed low before the grim soldier, saying, “ Alas ! O Prince, it is this prodigality which is the cause of the misery in which you now see me.” Placated utterly by this indirect testimonial to his own get-and-kill, kill-and-get manner of life, Tamerlane gave orders that Hafiz should be treated with every consideration. The anecdote illustrates to perfection the struggle that is forever proceeding between the advocates of action and the advocates of pleasure.

“ The drum ever cries, but what good doth it do,
Since its carcase is hollow and empty within ?
If wisdom be thine, then the Real pursue,
And be not deceived by a flatulent skin.”

Why should we weep because, as children of wit and folly formed out of inanimate dust, we are permitted to eat and drink and make love but for so fugitive a period? We have our hour for inventing "clay scarecrows": who can hope to reverse the order of the hasting months or stay the sequence of day and night?

"O God, although through fear I hardly dare
To hint it, all the trouble springs from Thee!
Hast Thou no sand or gravel in Thy sandals?"

Parted from our darlings we must be. It is an ordinance older than the Milky Way.

"What is this world? What asken men to have?
Now with his love, now in the colde grave
Alone, withouten any company."

The true achievement of the poetic imagination is to illuminate the transitory, "to see a world in a grain of sand," and to sing like a blackcap on a bramble!

"A moment's Halt—a momentary taste
Of Being from the Well amid the waste—
And lo!—the phantom caravan has reach'd
The Nothing it set out from—oh make haste!"

Edward Fitzgerald I have every reason to praise; his mantle has literally fallen upon my shoulders. In three continents my back has been warmed by his celebrated plaid shawl. It came through my uncle Mowbray Donne, the son of the "Old Donne"

of Fitzgerald's letters, and I have never been oblivious of the honour chance thus bestowed on me. Yet as I esteem Omar Khayyám and yet carp at him, so do I esteem and yet grudge at his famous interpreter. For despite the apparent grace of Fitzgerald's quatrains, plaintive as the twittering of migrating birds in the reeds of the Aldeburgh river, I cannot reconcile myself to the lack of gusto towards life that they display. In his letters this prevailing mood is shown clearly—sad, mild, unimpassioned.

“ June over ! A thing I think of with Omar-like sorrow. And the roses here are blowing—and going—as abundantly as ever in Persia.”

Fitzgerald celebrates Love, Wine, and Poetry, but ah ! how wanly. The faint desolation evoked by these verses ill befits the poignant and profound subjects of which they treat. Small wonder his poem appealed to the Pre-Raphaelite group who had accustomed themselves to see life always in reflection like so many Ladies of Shalott ; even Swinburne, if not writing of the sea, presenting us with a literary shadowland in the place of Nature—a shadowland where all is unreal, and where no cow-pats ever fell plop upon an actual green earth.

Fitzgerald's interest in Omar was, indeed, scarcely more than an indolent diversion to keep away “ the blue devils ” of whom he so constantly complains. There is upon occasion a disquieting suggestion

of an uneasy conscience over what he is about, so hard is it for this old-fashioned Suffolk gentleman to escape from the spiritual imprisonments of his time.

"The philosophy," he writes, referring to Omar's poems, "is alas! one that never fails in the world," and again, as though a kind of apology were demanded of him, "No one cares for such things, and there are doubtless so many better things to care about." This proud reserved friend of Thackeray and Tennyson could never have followed the advice of his great Master, "Suppose thyself to be nothing and be free." His boldest action, if we omit his separation from his wife (and this was in keeping with the conduct of a wealthy idiosyncratic bachelor who did not care to alter his ways), was to dig up with Thomas Carlyle the bones of the soldiers who fell at Naseby, the battlefield being part of the Fitzgerald family property.

An air of condescension mars his letters. This is well illustrated by the absurd name he gave to the fisherman for whom he had so romantic an attachment—and how could he be so banal as to allude to Omar Khayyám as the "old sinner"? It is true that we have happier glimpses of him, as, for example, when he was reading a copy of the wonderful Bodleian Rubáiyát "profusely powdered with gold," in a Bedfordshire buttercup-filled horse-paddock "brushed by a delicious breeze," and yet even in these harmonious surroundings he displays the same diffidence. "You would be sorry, too, to think that

Omar breathes a sort of consolation to me ! ” These quiet scenes do have, however, a peculiar grace of their own, similar to the gentle benediction that used to come to Fitzgerald as he listened to the Sunday hymn-singing from the field outside the church of Boulge.

He now lies in the yard of that same Suffolk church with the words “ It is He that hath made us ” to be read on his gravestone. I myself have seen how peacefully the sunlight falls upon that large field which separates the church from the lane. The landscape is a typically English one—a landscape of calm and solid security, a landscape of white gates, of white geese, and narrow daisy-white footpaths.

How different from the resting-place of the older, tougher-hearted master ! At the hour before dawn the caravans approach Nishapour.

“ They feel the cool wet turf under their feet
By the stream-side, after the dusty lanes
In which they have toil'd all night.”

The last stage of the travelling is almost over ; the drovers, trudging by the sides of their beasts, jest under the cold stars, all of them heartless realists with their heads full of thoughts that have more to do with victuals and girls in the bazaars than with God.

“ Wake ! For the Sun, who scattered into flight
The stars before him from the Field of night
Drives Night along with them from Heav'n, and strikes
The Sultán's Turret with a shaft of Light.”

It is daylight before the traders reach the city. They pass close to the tomb of Omar enclosed now in a seventeenth-century garden shrine put up by Shah Abbas the Great to the memory of Mohamed Mahruk. The camels, with their silent cushion feet, plod on, their grotesque antique faces snuffing up the air for the first whiff of anticipated fodder. The hungry men with quick black eyes observe everything—the scavenger dog they have disturbed, which, with long ribs showing, nervously raises a lank hind leg against a soiled wall, the fruit trees once more in blossom—a pear tree and a peach tree with petals falling on the poet's grave, as he had prophesied they would in the Slave Street eight hundred years ago.

The skull of Omar Khayyám must long since have fallen to pieces, a skull of dust that had once possessed a tongue of flesh. No emblematic coffin of vine-planks could long hold back from his "truth-speaking lips" their destined diet of sand. The heads of all men are but ephemeral pots of clay fitted with wagging tongues.

"Hear thou the word of Truth from Omar Khayyám
Drink wine, rob on the highway, and be Benevolent."

Does this final admonition conceal an esoteric message for the freer spirits of every age? Though nearly a millennium has passed since "that great man has veiled his countenance in the dust," many still know themselves to be his natural children.



G. M. Powys.

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

NICCOLO MACHIAVELLI

It is impossible for men to conduct themselves with consideration and control. The essential frivolity of their minds, the shallow inconstancy of their emotions, reveal on every occasion their base simian lineage. They are a breed of animals debarred by birth from civilized behaviour. With their close-set ears well plugged with Lucian's celebrated wax, the substance of which is ignorance and deceit; with their hearts full of "hidden malignity," they encompass the earth, generation after generation, the great in their pride, and the mob in their stench, without hope of improvement. Such were the "damnable opinions" of Machiavelli that for a period of four centuries have raised so noisy a clamour of dissension and protest.

What manner of man, then, was this Florentine Secretary, this "mokker of all religion and vertew"? Intellectual emancipation was as natural to him as was the air he breathed. The religious and ethical preconceptions that besot ordinary heads left his clear. It might be said that the grave import of the two words, good and evil, was never understood by him. As far as he was concerned, Eve might never have nibbled at her Venus pippin.

From a study of his work and of his private correspondence it is easy to form an idea of the main outlines of his philosophy. It was his fundamental opinion that our life owes no single event to any man-interested deity. He saw all earth-life carried forward by an irresistible destiny, which, like an insurgent flood, sweeps on and on to the unplumbed ocean of death. But, as with the thought of Epicurus, this Florentine Prometheus leaves a crack open for the operation of man's free will. He held that each of us has a modicum of freedom, an independent freehold, within the boundaries of which, confined though they inevitably must be, foresight and intelligent direction are still profitable; dykes may be strengthened and banks thrown up against the onrushing tidal wave. There can be in his opinion no greater folly than for man to try to stem the flood, to contest directly against the movement of Fate. "I repeat once more, what from all history is seen to be most true, that men may aid Fortune, and not withstand her; they may weave her webs but not break them."

His considered judgment of religion, that hoary obsession of the nations, was completely cynical. He regarded it merely as a providential instrument of Government. "This good citizen," as Rousseau called him, understood centuries before Karl Marx its pragmatic use as a drug for the masses. To the mystical claims of religion, so pathetic, indeed so tragic, he remained, from first to last, blind, deaf,

and dumb. In *The Prince*, his most perfect work, precise and deadly as a poisoned dagger, he writes :—

“To which end they [the Government] should countenance and further whatsoever tells in favour of religion, even should they think it untrue; and the wiser they are and the better they are acquainted with natural causes, the more ought they to do so.”

To be “acquainted with natural causes”—that is the open secret that should be the natural possession of all free, practical spirits of *virtu*. Life as he had seen it in Renaissance Italy had destroyed his confidence in the efficacy of prayer. He regarded prayer as an entirely meaningless and futile practice inadvertently profitable to Governments, and that was all.

“Prayers are indeed necessary; and he is downright mad who forbids the people their ceremonies and devotions. For from them it seems that men reap union and good order, and upon these depend prosperity and happiness. Yet let no man be so silly as to believe that, if his house falls upon his head, God will save it without any other prop, for he will die beneath the ruins.”

All his famous “policies” have their roots in his indurated conviction as to the irremediable depravity of mankind—“ungrateful, inconstant, hypocritical, fearful of danger, and covetous of gain.” This conviction is an accepted axiom with him, a

self-evident truth, and upon it he elaborates his subtle science. Anticipating our modern psychologists, he recognizes that morality is nothing but conduct-pressure from the herd.

“ The sanction of conduct was derived from positive institutions ; where no law existed, no action could be unjust. . . . In the beginning of the world, as the inhabitants were few, they lived for a time dispersed after the manner of wild beasts, afterwards, when they increased and multiplied, they united together and in order the better to defend themselves, they began to look to that man among them who was the strongest and bravest, and obeyed him. From this arose the knowledge of the honourable and good, as opposed to things pernicious and evil.”

It was thus that men came to know good and evil, but they remained still in their natures essentially brutish. “ For men will always prove bad, unless by necessity they are compelled to be good.”

There are two methods by which such necessary discipline can be applied : law and force. Of these the first is “ proper to man,” the second proper to beasts. “ It belongs therefore to a Prince to understand both, when to make use of the rational and when of the brutal way.” Fear rules the world. Fear is a more constant force and more to be relied upon than love.

“ Men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared : for love is

preserved by the bond of obligation, which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their own advantage; but fear is preserved by the dread of punishment, which never fails."

When once any society has been so drilled into good behaviour that the majority can live securely, there will be no more talk of freedom. "Justice embodied in Laws is the soul of Freedom."

He sees all states caught in a revolving wheel of inevitable recurrence.

"*Virtu* produces peace, peace idleness, idleness disorder, disorder ruin . . . then when a district has been involved in disorder for a time, *virtu* returns to dwell there once again . . . for this is the circle revolving within which all states are and have been governed."

A hypocritical unction, a congenital leaning towards sanctimonious prevarication, is part of the very constitution of ordinary human beings. Machiavelli is himself entirely free of any such weakness. His mind is without cant. It strikes deep into life, as a man with a single stroke might stab at the bowels of his enemy. Continually he shocks our complacency, and indeed we may take it for granted that the traditional gregarious prepossessions of our kind, their more tender superstitions, cannot have meant much to a man capable of alluding to Cæsar Borgia's murder of Vitellozzo and Oliverotto as the most beautiful treachery, "*il bellissimo inganno*"! With his inhuman detachment

he draws deductions from the affairs of men, as a vivisectionist might from the behaviour of his unlucky mice. He searches to deduce rules of conduct that are dependent upon "natural causes" and uninfluenced by human sentiment. His "Hatch-evil" writings are charged with dangerous non-moral dynamite. Perfidy, for example, deliberately used for a particular end, never struck him as discreditable, "for though the act accuses him, the result excuses him." Again and again he emphasizes the fact that people are always taken in by the "appearance and events of things," and he calmly announces that "he who is dead cannot think about revenging himself."

We can hardly wonder that *The Prince*, with its "pestilent Machiavellian policies," has been the treasured handbook of those who have aspired to tyrannical rule. It was the favourite night-cap reading of Louis XIV. Frederick the Great attempted to cover his dubious tracks by writing a treatise against it. A carefully annotated copy of it was found in Napoleon's coach at Waterloo.

Machiavelli observed that men shrink from leaving the beaten highway of human conduct, they do not dare to be "gloriously wicked" or, as he expresses it in his own reserved and sinister manner, "to have recourse to extremities." "The night that Pier Sodernini died his soul went down to the mouth of hell; but Pluto cried 'Foolish soul, no hell for thee. Go to the Limbo of the babes.'"

Cardinal Pole accused him of writing with the finger of Satan, but in reality his pages are penned with the cold starfish thumb of science. He tells us himself that he does not wish to give us a fancy picture, but to go to the "real truth of things." He considers the problems of statecraft as though human beings were beasts without hearts and as easy as beasts to be overreached. Throughout the generations idealists have always hated him, execrated him, called him "illiterate atheist." His unemotional conclusions have, however, appealed to men of a scientific temper of mind, to men of reason, like Bacon, who asserts: "We are much beholden to Machiavelli . . . who wrote what men do and not what they ought to do."

We would have gravely misunderstood Machiavelli nevertheless if we believed that the chiefest interest of his years lay in the solutions of fine social conundrums. Though without doubt he recognized the pleasure to be derived from "power acquired and enjoyed on earth," yet the allegiance to life of this great realist was too passionate, too imaginative, too profound, to allow him to find his highest satisfaction in such vanities. It was natural for his mind to be exercised with each succeeding political crisis, but his secret preoccupation, his serious personal preoccupation, was with his own love affairs. There is no doubt that these were the events that really mattered to him. Because La Barbere does not write to him from Rome he takes no less a person

than Guicciardini into his confidence, and even manages to persuade him to go and find out what the matter is, "for she gives me more anxiety than the Emperor himself." He dreads lest his reputation as a man of judgment may not be sufficient to win for him "a fleeting kiss" from La Riccia, or that age may deprive him of his privileged place by Donato's fireside. It has often been so with great men. It is always the conventional or the cabined spirits who have turned away from this creative source of recurrent animal refreshment. In one of his letters Machiavelli declares that while his worldly activities have brought him nothing but anxiety and loss, from his love affairs he has derived in every case advantage and joy.

In his late middle life, after he had been put upon the rack and banished from Florence, it was still this same sweet folly that sustained his soul. A letter to his friend Francesco Vettori, a letter without cynicism, sensitive, innocent even, has to do with a girl he had met in the fields.

"Being exiled in the country I have met with a creature so gentle, so delicate, so noble, both in her nature and her attributes, that I can neither praise nor love her as she deserves . . . the threads have become strong, made fast with knots that cannot be untied."

In a still more celebrated letter he describes his daily life at San Casciano. In the morning he talks with the woodcutters, "who are always full of some

misfortune either of their own or their neighbours "; he then goes off to snare thrushes; and afterwards to the tavern to play at cards or dice with the butcher and miller and maltster, their voices sounding far across the fields with " endless wrangling and offensive words " over a disputed farthing.

" The Brewer, the Maltster, the Miller, and I
Left a heifer, left a filly, left a Ding Dong;
They weren't the same pretties, but what's that to we,
Pass along, boys ! Pass along ! "

And then in the evening he returns to his home, and taking off his soiled country dress, he puts on court attire and enters his library to commune with the great minds of antiquity, a peer amongst his peers, at peace at last, " and for the space of four hours I feel no weariness, and forget every trouble; I have no fear of poverty, and am not dismayed by death."

A discerning reader may derive from his writings certain invaluable hints as to the conduct of life. His shrewd observations last well. " Honest slaves are always slaves and good men always paupers." He maintained that the secret of a fortunate life lies in a man's power to adapt himself to the circumstances that are beyond his control, that man being happy " whose manner of proceeding concerts with the times, and he unhappy who cannot accommodate to this." Above all things it is necessary to be detached in one's outlook, to preserve always an uninvaded philosophical citadel amid the jolting

events of this naughty world. "It is convenient for his mind to be at his command and flexible to all the puffs and variations of fortune." A man must be ready at all times to return undistracted to the hushed closet of his own proud, lonely soul. "For long I have never said what I believed nor believed what I said, and even if at times I speak the truth I hide it among so many lies that it is hard to find."

Machiavelli was a liberal humanist, a spirited advocate of the wisest and sanest of all human traditions. In matters of love, wherein is man's greatest profit under the sun, he forestalls the wisdom of William Blake.

"Those are tormented by Love who, when he settles in their breasts, would either bind him, or clip his wings. . . . But those who, when he goes let him depart, and when he returns accept him readily, are always honoured and caressed by him and triumph beneath his rule."

Upon our sad earth, where, because of false values too readily accepted, where, because of thwartings and frustrations, "men come to carry written in their eyes the terror of their souls," few dare to speak out the simple truth. To enjoy the present benefit of time was Machiavelli's aim, and without reservations he exhorts us also to go and do likewise.

"He who is held wise by day will never be held foolish by night; for he who is esteemed a man of worth, and who deserves such a reputation, may do what he will to amuse himself and

to live gladly. . . . I can only give you this advice—to follow Love *totis habenis*, and that pleasure which you take to-day you will not have to take to-morrow. I beg of you to follow your star, and not to lose aught of what it may bring you for anything in the world; for I believe and always shall believe in the truth of what Boccaccio says : that ‘it is better to do and to repent than not to do and to repent’ . . . and thus we dally with these universal pleasures, enjoying what remains to us of this life, which seems to me a dream.”



G. M. Powys.

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS

FRANÇOIS RABELAIS

RABELAIS's genius is as deep and as uncircumscribed as is life. Here is a wild duck that will support no saddle, a Bridle-goose not easily to be bridled ! For nearly four hundred years the wisest scholars of Europe have tried to discover Rabelais's secret and to explain it in words that all men could understand. They have failed. Like Shakespeare and like Goethe, he is an interpreter of the eternal mysteries, and for this very reason is full of contradictions. He is heretical, blasphemous, and yet at the same time religious. He is gross, and yet at the same time most delicate. To regard him merely as a drinker with a taste for wenching is to misunderstand the whole temper of his mind.

It is impossible not to be struck by the difference between the Rabelaisian tone in regard to erotic and excremental matters and the kind of outspokenness of our own day. With Mr. James Joyce, for example, the urge underlying his obscenities is a savage, almost pathological attraction-repulsion ; whereas with Rabelais " these primordials " simply fall into their places like splendid sacraments, essential parts of his huge gala song.

His broad, free, humorous treatment of " country

matters " has done us service. It has cleared the air of much that is hypocritical and unseemly, and has been a justification for many sincere people who have wished to approach such subjects in a natural way. It should be clearly understood that Rabelais never wrote a single page that is pornographic. In fact he is the great purifier. He lets fresh air into the unhealthy closets of human society, and his laughter, like sunshine, causes wormwood and pungent camomile to grow out of the very middens of the world. Concealed drains are dangerous, those open to the air harmless. Rabelais follows the aristocratic tradition of *natural refinement*.

It is, in truth, Rabelais's wisdom to accept life on its own terms. He is a philosophic optimist, one of the few who commands our respect. Big fish eat little fish, and he knows it well; but when Panurge by his superior wit overreaches Ding-dong and drowns sheep and shepherds in the sea, he feels no concern. He is a true individualist and believes that each human being should fulfil his destiny without let or hindrance. He is the champion of freedom, the liberator of the human spirit, and before his God-like hilarity the conventions tremble.

As we read, however, it becomes clear that his celebrated admonition "Do what thou wilt" resulted from his life-long conviction that constraint and tyranny turn men's minds to evil. "Because men that are free, well-born, well-bred, and conversant in honest companies, have naturally an

instinct and spur that prompteth them unto virtuous actions, and withdraws them from vice," Rabelais would have us feel confidence in the natural goodness of man guided by the recommendations of sweet reason. What he hates are the narrow, unenlightened views of illiberal persons who are forever trying to capture the wild gods that they may domesticate them for their own glory. Self-expression alone is of importance. "Give yourself up to the study of Nature's truths and let nothing in the world be unknown to you." He would have each of us drink of the good wine of life "with unbuttoned bellies."

He is contemptuous of those who sacrifice the golden hours of consciousness to the task of making money. When Pantagrue is asked to become president of the courts, he refuses. "For," said he, "there is too much slavery in these offices." And later when Pantagrue offers Panurge "a sweet remonstrance against his squandering the revenues of the Lairdship of Salmygondin in Dipsodie" and reminds him that his reckless manner of living renders it "hugely difficult" for him (Pantagrue) to make him rich, Panurge answers:—

"Rich! Have you fixed your thoughts there? . . . Set your mind to live merrily in the name of God and good folks, let no other cark nor care be harboured within the sacrosanctified domicile of your celestial brain. . . . For if you live joyful, merry, jocund, and glad, I cannot be but rich enough."

Apart from such honest harmless "knacks of wit," what wisdom is to be found in these extraordinary and fabulous chapters ! If the teaching of this "new gospel" had been followed for the last four hundred years, how large an amount of misery would the world have been spared ! This, for example, is how Rabelais writes of war :—

"The time is not now, as formerly, to conquer the kingdoms of our neighbour princes, and to build up our own greatness upon the loss of our nearest Christian brother. This imitation of the ancient Herculeses, Alexanders, Hannibals, Scipios, Cæsars, and other such heroes, is quite contrary to the profession of the gospel of Christ . . . and that which heretofore the Barbarians and Saracens called prowess and valour, we now call robbing, thievery, and wickedness."

And again :—

"These devilish kings, which we have here, are but as so many calves, they know nothing, and are good for nothing, but to do a thousand mischiefs to their poor subjects, and to trouble all the world with war for their unjust and detestable pleasure."

The style of this notable jester frisks and capers "like an ass with a brizze or gad bee under his tail." It is capable of scattering the vapours of all men, whether simple or learned. Not one of us but can play at his parlour games—at "charming the hare," at "grapple my lady." His high spirits

redeem the most grotesque incidents. When Gargantua returns from war, he combs cannon-balls out of his hair, "which his father, Grangousier, seeing, thought they had been lice, and said unto him: 'What, my dear son, hast thou brought us this far, some short-winged hawks of the college of Montague?'" Friar John is advised that the doctors think not too well of the excessive consumption of alcohol. "Well physicked," said the monk; "a hundred devils leap into my body, if there be not more old drunkards than old physicians." Panurge harbours a very characteristic grudge against the Parisians. "They are," said he, "little tippling sippers that drink no more than the little bird called a spink or chaffinch," and he loves nothing better than to see "a great puffguts of a counsellor" overthrown by his roguery. Epistemon, when he returned from his visit to hell (where he saw Xerxes, as a crier of mustard, and Villon, wrangling with him because he offered to enhance its price), brought back the comfortable news that the very devils were "boon companions and merry fellows." Whether in heaven or in hell, all is heyday with Rabelais. How excellent is the description of Panurge's dream!

"A pretty, fair, young, gallant, handsome woman, who no less lovingly and kindly treated and entertained me, hugged, cherished, cockered, dandled, and made much of me, as if I had been another neat dilli-darling minion like Adonis.

. . . A little after, though I know not how, I thought I was transformed into a tabor and she into a chough or madge-howlet."

In his waking hours this most lovable wag of mediæval mischief and piety goes to the death-bed of the poet Raminagrobis, who has just driven from his chamber a flock of priests "dun and ash coloured," in order that he may be able to repose himself "and acquiesce in the contemplation of the vision, yea, almost in the very touch and taste of the happiness and felicity which the good God hath prepared for his faithful saints and elect in the other life and state of immortality." Though the old man was obviously dying "within grace," he was to Panurge, because he had offended the priesthood, an arrant heretic "by the virtue of God, a resolute, formal heretic." Panurge was convinced his chamber was full of devils. He would not enter it again. "For," said he, "who knows but that these hungry, mad devils may in the haste of their rage and fury of their impatience, take a qui for a quo, and instead of Raminagrobis snatch up poor Panurge frank and free?"

It is interesting to notice as we read these broad pages the peculiar dignity, so natural and yet so spacious, that surrounds the lives of the giant kings. Their simplest actions have about them a grave and royal style, their great heads, large enough to contain whole worlds, are entirely purged of the kind of distempers that poison the minds of

men "who always look out at one hole." What excellent reading it is when Grangousier catches sight of the staff of one of the pilgrims that Gargantua is about to eat up with his lettuce, and with true paternal care stays him for the moment with the words, "I think that is the horn of a shell-snail, do not eat it," or, best of all the glimpses Rabelais gives us of the old king in his home when "after supper he sits warming his ballocks by a good, clear, great fire, and, waiting upon the broiling of some chestnuts, is very anxious in drawing scratches on the hearth, with a stick burnt at one end, wherewith they did stir up the fire, telling to his wife and the rest of his family pleasant old stories and tales of former times."

When limited people deplore the works of Rabelais for religion's sake "my soul is ready to fly into some marsh among frogs." That he was profoundly religious can be proved in sentence after sentence. Often in the midst of his maddest sallies, his most copious ribaldry, there will fall upon the page a sudden stillness, and this little great good man by some utterance full of devout feeling will call up comfort for our souls out of the depths. It has been well said "he preserved a certain faith in things that were for the time impossible of demonstration." Where you least look for it there starts the hare. It appears that this doctor "in the jovial quirks of his gay learning" *puts his trust in God*. "Wisdom," he writes somewhere, "cannot

enter a malicious spirit, and knowledge without conscience is the ruin of the soul." Friar John declares against the priests, "But may God be their aid if they pray for us, and not through fear of losing their rich soups." To which Pantagruel answers, "All true Christians of all estates, in all places, in all times, pray to God, and the spirit prayeth and intercedeth for them, and God receiveth them into favour." Of great chapters in literature few are more moving than the one in which Pantagruel explains that the proclamation "the great God Pan was dead," delivered to the pilot Thamous in the Sea of Paxos, referred to the death of our Lord. It is a passage I would commend to the notice of all readers "who are worthy and fit to receive the celestial manna of honest literature." It is as though the pathos of that enchantment with which we surround our childish hopes were at last understood by a mind sensitive, undaunted, and full of a tender irony.

"For my part, I understand it of that great Saviour of the faithful who was shamefully put to death at Jerusalem. . . . And methinks my interpretation is not improper; for he may lawfully be said in the Greek tongue to be Pan, since he is our all. For all we are, all that we love, all that we have, all that we hope, is him, by him, from him, and in him. He is the God Pan, the great shepherd. At his death, complaints, sighs, fears, and lamentations were spread through the whole fabric of the universe, whether heaven, land, sea, or hell. . . . Panta-

gruel having ended this discourse remained silent, and full of contemplation. A little while after, we saw the tears flow out of his eyes as big as ostrich's eggs."

It has been my custom when in the presence of a wise man to question him on the subject of the immortality of the soul, and the answers I have got have been "not unlike to the song of Gammer Yea-by-nay."

No words uttered by Saint Paul are as apt at allaying incredulity as are Rabelais's careless oracles. "I believe," said Pantagruel, "that all intellectual souls are exempted from Atropos's scissors."

The benedictions of Rabelais in their amplitude resemble the benisons of the earth herself, as if the corn-bearing, grape-bearing planet had blest us with her wild blessing. No man or no woman need fear to go to confession "under a burdock leaf" with such a monk. He is the great reconciler of the natural with the supernatural. Catholics, Protestants, Turks, and Atheists, we need none of us feel ashamed to call ourselves believers after the order of this Saint Francis Rabelais. The net of this antic fisher is wide and the meshes of it are free and open. "Now, my friends, you may depart, and may that intellectual sphere, whose centre is everywhere, and circumference nowhere, whom we call God, keep you in his almighty protection."



G. M. Powys.

THOMAS DELONEY

THOMAS DELONEY

IN English literature no great writer has been more neglected than has Thomas Deloney, the Elizabethan novelist. His three prose works, *Jacke of Newberie*, *The Gentle Craft*, and *Thomas of Reading*, have often enough been made centres of discussion by academic critics concerned to trace the origin and development of English prose fiction, but among the authors of all this scholarly research, there has been found no one to do adequate justice to his astonishing genius.

Outside of Christopher Marlowe, Shakespeare, Ford, and Ben Jonson, he has no match in the Elizabethan era. It is impossible for Thomas Deloney to write in a dull manner. His zest for life, quick as a sprite in a buttery, displays itself in every sentence, in every word that he puts down. His realism has never been equalled. His power in this kind is as sure as ever was that of Boccaccio. The characters he invents are no book characters. They are actual shop-door, street-corner people who eat possets, drink sack or muskadine, and cry, and sneeze, and stand upon very shoe-leather.

His affirmation of the delight of being abroad in the ordinary common-sense world is very stout. To

contemplate a dame "carrying the keys of her cubberts gingling at her side" is for him reward enough. These three works might have been written by Sancho Panza, with such shrewd earth-aplomb do they present the impulses and the emotions of the indiscriminate crowd, of that section of the population which may be said to have their heads "screwed on the right way." Deloney's writing is never far removed from the dust of the King's High Road, from the egg-cobbles of the London streets, from actuality at its lowest level.

It has been a fanciful prejudice with me to remark a difference between flower-shop salesmen and ironmongers. The former, because it is their profession to make commercial profit out of beauty, grow, so it seems, shallow and artificial in their address, whereas ironmongers, because it is their business to supply people with utensils necessary for daily use, become sensible and honest citizens. Thomas Deloney may be said to represent the ironmongers in literature; one who knows how essential colanders, kettles, frying-pans, and saucepans are to human beings. The unredeemed lives of ordinary people are his province. His sense of poetry is of that simple kind that can be understood by everybody—by the coal-man, by the ice-man, by the fruit-man at the curb; the poetry that has to do with the yellow sun shining bright upon field and market-place, the poetry that has to do with the rumour that "women are not angels, though they have

angel faces"—the poetry, in fact, that is concerned with the whole torrential stream of life, parti-coloured, manifold with its sudden turns of fate, turns of fate that overtake and surprise each one of us with their irrelevant unexpectedness. And what an observation Deloney had for the twists and quirks to be found in human character! Carelessly he etches in for us brabbling dames, penny-father old men, and prodigal youths; and at once these phantom puppets of his imagination are walking between the street booths, standing at their cutting-stools, or sitting at their removable refectory tables gutting pudding pies; are actually there before us, at one moment out of temper, and at the next grinning, but always there firmly set in farting flesh.

No lover of the sun should be content to remain unacquainted with the prose works of this master. "Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' the mouth too." He is kin to Cervantes, sib to François Rabelais. He belongs to those who do not trouble themselves with the idealistic foibles that besot the minds of so many human beings, to those who are satisfied with the world as it is, with that unregenerate world that wags on irrespective of beliefs, in taverns where reckonings are "set up in very fair chalk," and under the big elm trees in the square where the butter-women's tongues "like lambs' tails seldom stand still."

Thomas Deloney is not concerned with improving

manners or with inculcating moral precepts. His vitality is such that he is able to celebrate every phase of life. He is in love with the whole of life, and his prodigious animal spirits make every object he sees, every person he meets, interesting to him. He has no desire to correct. He seems to take for granted that his art could have no better purpose than to present the great Shrove-Tuesday Procession of life as it is, without comment.

Little is known about him. Nash refers to him as "the Balletting Silke Weaver of Norwich," and it has been assumed from his name that he belonged to some continental Protestant family which, because of religious persecution, had settled in England. It was natural enough that the "university wits" should deride the work of "T. D.," for when they wrote of the underworld, it was from above downward. To them Deloney was little better than "a base mechanical." He had sold his own ballads in Cheapside and sung them outside countless alehouse doors. All his life long, apprentices, tradespeople, porters, serving-wenchs, had been his companions. He could write of Jack of Newbury with enthusiasm because he himself had not seldom been pinched of his victuals. He had the poor man's romantic admiration for the rich man's liberality because he had learnt how hard it is to come honestly by a gammon of bacon. His literary material is ever where human life is natural, without pretensions. It never would enter the head

of a labourer going through the streets of a city to worry whether his hands were dirty, or whether the knees of his trousers had been patched: on such points he is without care, and Deloney wrote with the enfranchisement of one of the lower classes too pressed by life's realities to trouble much about its niceties.

He is supposed to have been born in 1543, and he died around 1600. It was by his ballad-writing that he first won popularity amongst skylarking prentices, cockcrow ostlers, impecunious tradespeople, water-men, fairfield chafferers, and the unnumbered sweaty-caps of his time. Some disaster, a fire, a hanging, would be in everybody's mouth, and immediately up would start T. D., "in his tawny coat," to commemorate the event in jiggling verse.

" Like to the fatal ominous Raven which tolls
The sicke man's dirge within his hollow beake."

Some popular discontent would be abroad in "Merrie England," and sure enough before long would find expression in one of Deloney's ballads. In the famine year of 1596 his "Ballad on the Want of Corn" was written to such purpose that for some time the Mayor of London was "in search for T. D." The ballad represented Queen Elizabeth as speaking with her people "Dialogue-wise in a very fond and undecent sort." It may have been this particular happening that turned Deloney's

attention to prose, for we know that he had a son to provide for at his weaver's home somewhere in the parish of St. Giles, Cripplegate.

He wrote carelessly, "composing as he goes i' the street," giving the populace, to draw them from their dumps, imaginary stories of lives similar to their own. To do it was as easy as sop to Deloney, because he knew his subjects so well. We need not look for "any matter of light value, curiously pen'd with pickt words or choice phrases, but a quaint and plain discourse best fitting matters of merri-ment." The University wits, these masters of "pick't words," saw him doing better than they what they had been trying to do; and many were the flirts and frumps that used to float down to the groundling poet from the heights of their Euphues Parnassus. Greene, apologizing that he should demean himself by writing his *Defence of Conny Catching*, says, "Such triviall trinkets and thread-bare trash, had better seemed T. D. whose braines beaten to the yarking up of Ballades, might more lawfully have glaunst at the quaint conceites of conny-catching and crosse-biting." "These fellows," says another, "are in every corner of cities and market Townes of the Realme singing and selling of ballads and pamphlets full of ribauldrie, and all scurrilous vanity, to the prophanation of God's name."

"The Muse of Thomas Deloney," wrote Nash, "from the first peeping foorth, hath stood at Livery

at an Alehouse wispe, never exceeding a penny a quart, day or night, and this deare yeare, together with the silencing of his looms, scarce that; he being constrained to betake him to carded Ale."

Kempe appended a note to his *Nine Daies Wonder* addressed "to the impudent generation of Ballad-makers." In this note he declares:—

"I have made a privy search, what private Jigmonger of your jolly number hath been the Author of these abominable Ballets written of me. I was told it was the great Ballad-maker T. D., alias Thomas Deloney. . . . But I was given to understand, your late general, Thomas, died poorly (as you all must do) and was honestly buried, which is much to be doubted of some of you."

How often in Shakespeare have we longed for more talk from the country people, from his God's idiots, and weasel-brained hedge rogues! The pages of Deloney are packed with such unstudied chatter, packed with kitchen wisdom. His is the wisdom of a coffin-bearer meditating upon a life that is over; the wisdom of old Gran Prat, the midwife, slapping a new-born baby to life, and meditating upon its future of lust and hunger and piety; the wisdom of a town-crier; of an aged priest; the wisdom that belongs to men and women who have been so jostled by the years that they can be surprised by nothing, with minds sharp, shrewd, and disillusioned that hit the mark at the first jump.

“ For cunning continueth when fortune fleeteth . . . it is gone, farewell it.” All those apt saws, broad expressions of speech that are to us so refreshing, like time-resistant, homespun patches from the cloak of human wisdom, abound in these little-read pages. It may be for their very outspokenness that they have received such scant recognition. Always Deloney is a “ groundling ” writing for “ groundlings,” and his unintellectual simplicities and grossness may be an offence to the official appraisers of literature who pass through life removed from too close contact with the “ rabblement ” who sweep their floors, make their fires, and roast their capons. Anybody who is directly concerned, day in and day out, with the mean employments indispensable to human living cannot be utterly foolish. To be entirely superficial, one must be safely removed from scouring pans. When a woman is hemming a nightgown or cooking a Christmas dinner, without conscious effort an awareness of the realities of existence presses in upon her, and the same thing happens to a man who strikes an ox to the floor in the shambles, or who spends the greater part of an April day digging a grave.

Deloney’s world is a world of tradesmen, of fickle-headed tailors, of weavers who sit at their looms “ in a row ”; of the people who, though not invited to the banquet, scrabble for the ortes behind pantry doors and then return home to sleep in truckle-beds; of the boys who play at push-pin

in the streets; of the boys who go to carry water from the conduit; of the old women who pummel soiled linen at the bottom step of a stairway leading down to the Thames—indeed, of all poor people whom, as Deloney remarks with gentle irony, “God lightly blesseth with most children.”

If ever he has occasion to refer to the gentry or nobility, it is as privileged, faery-land folk with gracious manners and “lily-white hands,” with whom he and his fellows, fighting for “bitten apples,” have little in common. The motive of his plots often enough is the same motive that is popular to-day in the cinematograph theatres—the industry of a simple and good character suddenly rewarded, out of all expectation, with riches, and whose generosity—Deloney’s most highly esteemed virtue—remains still, under the changed circumstances, uncorrupted by the “slyding wealth of the world.”

It is in the London of Queen Elizabeth that his whimsical, jocund, and matter-of-fact characters live and move and have their being; in that London whose houses were, for the most part, mediæval, and where the Mermaid Tavern, with its two side doors, the one opening into Friday and the other into Bread Street, was still present: at a time when half an hour’s walk through any of the city gates, through Ludgate or Moorgate or Bishops-gate, would bring a man into the open country of reddle-bellied rams, of white-bonneted maids, of sweet-breathing, patient cows. To-day, not far

from Westminster Abbey, there is a street called Tuttle Street. It marks the place of Tuttle fields where was a meadow, famous in Deloney's time for assignations, a meadow to which went, in the Gentle Craft, the two "proper neat wenches" looking for heartsease and thrift. This is the London of Deloney's stories: the London of timbered house-fronts, of peeked gables, of steep-tilted roofs shining with snow over which one might expect to see witches flying astride upon broomsticks. It is the London of the train bands; the London of the prentice boys crying "Clubs," the London where "souls' cakes" were baked for All-hallow-e'en; the London resonant with the hearty calls of night-watchmen, "Two of the clock and a cold and frosty morning"; the London where lighted lanterns were hung in the church steeples after dark for the help of belated travellers; the London of cobble streets and garbage litter; the London of enclosed tavern yards, encircled with balconies, where, as the night passed, the "anon Sir, anon, Sir" of the drawer would imperceptibly give place to the stillness of the dead hours, when the only sound was an occasional stamp from tired horses, as King Charles's Wain rose high and higher over the "new chimney."

As it is so often with great artists, this "halfpenny chronicler" created within the circle of this actual Elizabethan London another London of his imagination, and this new London presently takes to itself

its own reality, a fabulous Rabelaisian reality under old St. Paul's.

“Afterwards they proceeded, and came to Paules Church, whose steeple was so hie, that it seemed to pierce the cloudes, on the top whereof, was a great and mightie wether-cocke, of cleane silver, the which notwithstanding seemed as small as a sparrow to men's eyes, it stood so exceeding high, and which goodly weather cocke was afterwards stolen away, by a cunning cripple who found meanes one night to clime up to the top of the steeple, and tooke it downe.”

Which of us has not been teased out of mind by a desire to have free entrance into the London of “Shakespeare's boys”? Ignorant we have of necessity remained. “We may as well push against Powles as stir 'em.” It is all here for us in Deloney's work. To read these three novels is to be privy to the stir of those far-off, noisy alleys; it is to rub shoulders with these vigorous men and women, and to hear their exact speech, the very words of the formal burgomaster in his velvet cap, the very words of the man “well whitled” staggering by a red-latticed sill, the very “prittle prattle” of the drabs in the rain.

To read Thomas Deloney's novels for the first time is an unequalled experience. He himself boasted that they were “very fit to passe away the tediousness of the long winter evenings,” and he never spoke a more true word. There is none who writes after his sort, so nimble, so solid, so

honest. What a smack of ancient actuality has been hidden away in these incomparable paragraphs !

Thomas Deloney defeats even Mortality. The prisoners that Death over three hundred years ago herded out of Cheapside and Pudding Lane no longer play at "mum budget," are no longer dumb. Their everyday canting talk comes to us pat across the centuries, as if they themselves were "rounding us in the ear." For Thomas Deloney knew them as a *gamin* knows his pennies.

"Twittle, twattle I know what I know. . . .
Life, why, what is it but a floure, a bubble in
the water, a spann long and full of misere :
and trust me I doe detest life, worse than a
goat doth hate basil . . . with hey trickse,
tringoe tricksee. Under the greenwood tree."



G. M. Powys.

ROBERT BURTON

ROBERT BURTON

ROBERT BURTON was in my opinion the greatest prose-writer of the greatest age of prose-writing that England has seen. Fuller's glancing style, the silvery clearness of Izaak Walton, the studied assonance of Sir Thomas Browne—like echoes in charnel-house corridors with knuckle-bones for commas and skulls for periods—weigh light in comparison with the work of this "loose, plain, rude writer." The wisdom of this old Oxford don wears well. The passing of the years does not invalidate it.

Burton was no metaphysician. He was a philosopher in the old broad usage of that word. He brings all his learning, all his wide reading, all his celibate sagacity to bear upon the spectacle of human life upon earth. Left to "mine own domestic discontents" in his study at Christ Church, he finds himself in a strategical position for conning without sentimentality "this mart of walking spirits." He reviewed the motley temporal world from his vantage point of perdurable wisdom; and now from a position "common as a barber's chair," and now from "his college window," he

blows hot and cold upon the huge porringer of life.

Though the old man has his fantasies, he is not deceived about the facts upon which our existence is built. The memory of death is never for long out of his head. "'Tis an inevitable chance, the first statute in Magna Charta, an everlasting act of Parliament." Here in the world, where "men contend as fishes do for a crumb that falleth into the water," where "commodity steers our affections throughout," all things flow away. What matters our strutting and becking and nodding?—"phantastic shadows, gulls, monsters, giddy heads, butterflies!" "What's a thousand years to eternity . . . innumerable, infinite millions of years, *in omne ævum, in æternum*. O Eternity!" Burton suspects life "as a fox on the ice." "We are all prisoners. What is our life but a prison? We are all imprisoned in an island. . . . Whatsoever is under the moon is subject to corruption, alteration, and as long as thou livest upon earth look not for other." If it were allowed, it were well to alter it. "The whole world belike should be new-moulded . . . and turned inside out as we do haycocks in harvest."

The inveterate folly of the human mind causes him more and more to marvel. "It were enough," he thinks, "to make them wise, if they would but consider the mutability of the world and how it wheels about, nothing being firm and sure. Never so much cause of laughter as now, never so many

fools and mad-men." How many humours in man—and to anatomize melancholy, what a task! More difficult than to trace out all the bays and sounds of the north-east passage "beyond the mighty promontory of Tabin"!

Thought itself is to be suspected. Burton was of opinion that "fools and dizzards live the merriest lives." Yet his despondency was not, in its ultimate analysis, an intellectual thing. "Saturn was lord of my geniture." Melancholy covered him like an old clout of dun or russet wool. Two influences undoubtedly augmented this congenital mood—the misery he suffered at his school, and the fact that "Venus omitted, produceth like effects." This last explains much, if not all. "They will by all means quench their neighbour's house if it be on fire, but that fire of lust which breaks out into such lamentable flashes they will not take notice of." It explains why he was constitutionally out of conceit with life, and why, whenever he writes of anything that has to do with "merry entertainment," his pen prances.

It is in the nature of man to be satisfied easily. If his hands and his emotions find expression, he is under no pressure to use his head. Life acts as a whetstone for our terraqueous and sottish wits. We construct illusions and are content in shunning unpalatable thoughts. It is only when things have gone awry that, here and there, like thistles in corn, people who use their minds see through the con-

ventional veils that human susceptibility is forever hanging between themselves and reality. When eyes are unblinkered, all grows unsteady as a cockboat at sea. Against a firmament "of such incomparable bigness as the Copernical giants will have it," all is reduced to nought. "If it be so that the Earth is a moon, then are we also giddy, vertiginous, and lunatic within this sublunary maze . . . when all are mad, who can discern madness? I refer to you, though you be likewise fools and madmen, and I as mad to ask the question."

Robert Burton was a person "of great honesty, plain dealing, and charity . . . a modest man, a generous spirit, one that hath grace," and, because he could not himself remedy rampant evil, he revenged himself by exposing it. He was not easily taken in. Look where he might, he saw nothing but rogues and bladder heads; "go backward and forward; choose out of the whole pack, wink and choose, you shall find them all alike, never a barrel better herring."

To this old scholar sitting in his chambers, sweetened with burning juniper, the human scene became a matter for laughter. He himself was outside the scramble. "I have little. I want nothing; all my treasure is in Minerva's tower." He no longer bustles for preferment. These "trencher chaplains" have always been too quick for him. He is not one to go "crouching to a rich chuff for a meal's meat." He is "like a mired horse that struggles at first . . .

but when he sees no remedy that his beating will not serve, lies still." On every side he saw men "be-sotted with their wealth as birds with hen-bane." Proud in his humility, "proud in that he is not proud," he lets the "gripping patrons" and pompous "huffing bishops" go by. In the management of the earth neither honesty nor reason is in the ascendant, and a wise man can do nothing better than "set his hands to his sides and laugh profusely" at the ways of the world.

The manifest "wrongs and absurdities" are too gross for gravity—to see "a lamb executed, a wolf pronounce sentence," to see "a man smile with an intent to do mischief, or cozen him whom he salutes," to see "a wittol wink at his wife's honesty, and too perspicuous in all other affairs," to see a jealous husband "as a heron when she fishes, still prying on all sides . . . why did she smile . . . a whore, a whore, an arrant whore!" to see a man "roll himself up like a snowball, from base beggary to right worshipful and right honourable titles . . . a hirsute beggar's brat, that lately fed on scraps, crept and whined, crying to all, and for an old jerkin ran of errands, now ruffle in silk and satin, bravely mounted, jovial and polite . . . insult over his betters."

By the contemplation of such a panopticon of whim-whams he seeks to restore those who suffer from melancholy. 'Tis a method of his own, a sort of spiritual homeopathy invented by this "wearish"

old empiric. For he himself had "a kind of impostume in his head." True, his book is full of conceits and contains not a dull page, but despite that it is so frolic its import is grave. He knew of what he was speaking. This surly humour and he had long been bedfellows. He writes of melancholy "by being busie to avoid melancholy." "If there is a hell on earth it is to be found in a melancholy man's heart . . . I say of our melancholy man, he is the cream of human adversity, the quintessence, the upshot; all other diseases whatsoever are but fleabittings." Through the pages of his lifelong work he offers himself as a scapegoat to posterity. In his own quaint way he says as much, "the great captain Zisca would have a drum made of his skin when he was dead, because he thought the very noise of it would put his enemies to flight. I doubt not but the following lines . . . will drive away melancholy, though I be gone." And 'tis a brave drum he bequeathed to us. Many a dispirited eccentric has been heartened by hearing the resonant tattoo, now light, now heavy, on the skin of this tough old ass.

What manner of man was Burton? He only half reveals himself even to those of his own kidney. "You may as well make the moon a new coat" as try to present him in his true character. It is happiest, perhaps, to think of him staying with his mother in Leicestershire. Much of the homely power of his prose he got, it seems, from this country

background; for it is abundantly clear that he, the great worthy of Oxford, was not always in love with being "mewed up in cloisters," penned in "like a hide-bound calf in a pasture." There were occasions when he was in two minds to turn his philosopher's gown "into a miller's coat . . . to sell ale as some have done, or worse," being impatient with his case, "kept from his cradle to his old age to behold the same still, still, still the same, the same."

It was down at Lindley, that "ancient patrimony in our family," that he observed Dame Dorothy, his mother, apply "the amulet of a spider in a nutshell lapped in silk" for an ague. "I could see no warrant for it. *Quid aranea cum febre?* For what antipathy? Till at length, rambling among authors (as often I do), I found the very medicine in Dioscorides, approved by Matthiolus, repeated by Alderovandus. *Cap. de Arenea, lib., de insectis*. I began to have a better opinion of it." We can well imagine him passing his days "in vacation" in that fat hunting country that had the praise for good "sydowe pease"; now talking with his brother, William, whose natural genius "had led him to the studies of heraldry, genealogies, and antiquities"; now sitting alone under the shade of boughs and leaves "plashed for cattle to stand under"; now walking in orchards and "back lanes"; now in neat gardens "full of exotic, versicolour, diversely varied, sweet-smelling flowers"; now along the banks of the River Anker, looking about him "with

great delight " to see " herons, ducks, water-hens, coots, and many other fowl, with their brood." Or he would loiter, perhaps, through the village, observing how a strange cur " if he clap his tail between his legs " will provoke other dogs " to insult over him," whereas, if he " bristle up himself and stands to it none will meddle with him." With an " ambient air," so health-giving, he could not but have found sanctuary from melancholy, " that feral fiend." He would sit down to a game of chess with his brother George or sister Katherine, in summer time " with roses, violets, sweet-smelling flowers in the windows," or, in winter, close up against the hearth " on cloudy, lowering, dark days."

" Chess-play is a good and witty exercise for the mind . . . but if it proceed from overmuch study it may do more harm than good; it is a game too troublesome for some men's brain, too full of anxiety, all but as bad as study; besides it is a testy, choleric game and very offensive to him that loseth the mate."

And then back again he would be in Oxford, giving the sacrament in wafers in the parish of St. Thomas and living " a silent, solitary, private life, mihi et musis "; borrowing books from John Rouse, the librarian of Sir Thomas Bodley's library—Chaucer, Montaigne, Rabelais, Hakluyt—or at some mellow midnight hour taking " a nutmeg and ale, or a good draught of muscadine, with a toast and

nutmeg, or a posset of the same" with Mr. Whitehall, "myne own Chamber Fellow."

We get odd and characteristic glimpses of him. One day he was sitting in the corner of a bookshop when the Earl of Southampton came in to bespeak a copy of the *Anatomy*. The obsequious stationer hastened to introduce the nobleman to the absent-minded scholar. "'Mr. Burton,' says the Earl, 'your servant.' 'Mr. Southampton,' says Mr. Burton, 'your servant,' and away he went," his head preoccupied with a thousand unexpected meditations as he shambled off past The Mitre in his old, torn gown, "ensign of his infelicity"; how the whole of life "is an Irish Sea, wherein there is nought to be expected but tempestuous storms . . . say poor and say all"; how he already had been in the university "as long, almost, as Xenocrates at Athens"; how wearisome a thing college life was—"leaping out of our beds when we hear the bell ring, as if we heard a thunderclap" . . . and this, when sleep "moistens and fattens the body as we see in dormice . . . sleeping under the snow in the dead of winter, as fat as butter." He would recall, perhaps, how he had "stood stupefied many times" at the first sight of beauty—before "the clear light of the moon," or at a market maid crossing the road. "Great Alexander married Roxane, a poor man's child, only for her person. 'Twas well done of Alexander, and heroically done. I admire him for it." Then once more he would be caught up in his

old depression, "extreme lumpish again in an instant . . . under hatches, dejected, rejected," as his mind would drift with more envy toward the skipping lechery of "afternoon men" and "how many decrepit, hoary, harsh, writhen, bustenbellied, crooked, toothless, bald, blear-eyed, impotent, rotten old men shall you see flickering still in every place?"

Yet the impression that Burton left behind was not of a crabbed or malicious man. Evidently—and we can well believe it in the intervals of his vapours—he was a sly droll at the high table. Anthony à Wood reported that he had heard "some of the antients of Christ Church say that his company was very merry, facete, and juvenile."

In January of the year 1640 he faced the last and greatest terror, *ultimum terribilium*. He died on the very day that he himself had predicted by the casting of his horoscope. It was whispered through the festive halls of Oxford "that rather than there should be a mistake in the calculation he sent up his soul to Heaven through a slip about the neck." It may be noted also that several years later Mr. Robert Hooke told Aubrey that "he lay in the chamber of Christ Church that was Mr. Burton's, of whom 'tis whispered non obstante all his astrology and his books of melancholy, that he ended his days in that chamber by hanging himself."

The epitaph he composed may still be read on his monument in Christ Church Cathedral. It is the scroll of "a polite and terse academic" such as he prided himself on being " *Paucis notus, paucioribus ignotus, hic jacet Democritus Junior, cui vitam dedit, et mortem Melancholia.*"



G. M. Powys

THOMAS HOBBS

THOMAS HOBBS

As soon as ever settled societies gave human beings leisure for thought, their anxious minds began to attribute the management of the world to unseen powers. In the course of the millenniums these conclusions were taken for granted, and, wherever the earth was inhabited by man, spiritual yearnings were directed heavenward.

From time to time throughout the centuries there have appeared thinkers who have been inclined to believe that the universe is unswayed by moral considerations, and that man is "as a colt of a wild ass in a wilderness without owner or obligation." Amongst these philosophers, extending from Epicurus to Santayana, Thomas Hobbes holds an important place. Francis Bacon used to commend Machiavelli for treating of "what men do in fact, and not what they ought to do," and the youth from Malmesbury who would walk by his side along the fragrant terraces and plum-tree avenues of Gorham-bury was destined still further to develop this realistic method so troubling to idealists of every age. Bacon used often to say that he "better liked Mr. Hobbes's taking his thoughts, than any of the others, because he understood what he wrote which

the others not understanding, my Lord would many times have a hard task to make sense of what they writt." It is easy for us to believe this, for the sagacious champion of experimental physics—"a true Extender of the Kingdom of Man over the universe"—was likely enough to find an attentive and apt disciple in a young man who held religion to have its root in fear of the supernatural and society in the fear of man; and who in another thirty years was to be charged with judging "school learning no better than plain jargon, that is, senseless gibberish or a fustian language like the chattering noise of sabots." It is a fact that Hobbes never succeeded in dissociating Oxford and Cambridge from the traditional word-wisdom of the schoolmen. "If words alone were sufficient, a parrot might be taught as well to know truth as to speak it." He taunted these houses of official learning for their insignificance of speech. "The universities have been to the nation as the wooden horse was to the Trojans," and again, "All the haranguing of infinities is but the ambition of schoolboys." Homer and Virgil were amongst the books usually to be seen on Hobbes's table, but he was fond of telling people that "if he had read as much as other men, he should have known no more than other men," a brag noted by Voltaire, who drily says of the greatest of all English anti-clerical philosophers that he had read nothing "*pas même l'Evangile.*"

Hobbes was of course a sound scholar and a highly

cultured man; but he may also be held up as an example of the extraordinary value of unacademic home-spun thinking. It was he who first boldly wrote, "Know, then; that all this is but an empty store of words, that has been drawn up and arraigned against the senses." His philosophy was firmly based on the most materialistic convictions, but never was there a sage more adroit at imparting his wisdom by implication rather than by direct utterance. That he was chary of giving to the world all his philosophic conclusions may be gathered from the remark he made after reading Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-politicus*, "He has cut through me a bar's length, for I durst not write so boldly."

The secret of all life's manifestations Hobbes believed to be motion. It was the perpetual flux of the Democritean atoms acting through the senses on the dull organs of the body that caused the brain to be disturbed into thought, as a rustling shiver will pass through the leaves of a poplar tree at a rising of the wind. He found, as others have found before him, and as others will find in the future, that the way of the senses is no way of error. The *Leviathan*, and Hobbes's argument with Bishop Bramhall, reveal him as a convinced determinist; and seldom if ever has the case against free will been treated with a firmer hand, or the case against Catholicism been presented more trenchantly. It is his humour in the last chapter of his famous work to liken the papacy to the kingdom of the fairies.

His huge mind disports itself with this fancy like a midsummer bull in a field of buttercups. Very clear and vigorous is the peroration and most admirably is it enlivened.

“The *ecclesiastics* are *spiritual* men, and *ghostly* fathers. The fairies are *spirits* and *ghosts*. *Fairies* and *ghosts* inhabit darkness, solitudes, and graves. The ecclesiastics walk in obscurity of doctrine, in monasteries, churches, and church-yards. . . . The *ecclesiastics* take from young men the use of reason, by certain charms compounded of metaphysics and miracles, and traditions, and abused Scripture, whereby they are good for nothing else, but to execute what they command them. The *fairies* likewise are said to take young children out of their cradles, and to change them into natural fools, which common people do therefore call elves, and are apt to mischief.

“The *fairies* marry not; but there be amongst them *incubi*, that have copulation with flesh and blood. The *priests* also marry not.”

Hobbes's interest in mathematics was but a late development, and it was possibly for this reason that his University opponents found it so easy to make game of his indiscretions. Provoked by Descartes's writings in favour of transubstantiation, “done merely to put a compliment on the Jesuits,” he did not scruple to suggest that the philosopher should concentrate his entire attention upon geometry, seeing that his head “did not lie for

philosophy." After the same manner, he himself had been wise to keep clear of higher mathematics, seeing that it "laid him so open."

How absorbing is the life of Thomas Hobbes, how solid, how idiosyncratic—and how long! He was born in the village of Westport just outside Malmesbury, in the year 1588, an April-Fool child, after his mother had received the false news that the Spanish Armada had come at last. Hobbes in after years used to suspect that his premature arrival disposed his nature to timorousness, a life-long characteristic which was conspicuously displayed upon the publication of his celebrated "little treatise," so subversive to the pretensions of the Parliament. "Then thought Mr. Hobbes, 'tis time now for me to shift for myself," and so withdrew into France, and resided at Paris . . . the first of all that fled." On the occasion of the publication of *Leviathan* he once more felt himself to be in jeopardy, and returned to England with a like alacrity, duly proffering his submission to the Council of State in 1652, and never again leaving his native land. His foes tried to suggest that he had deliberately written *Leviathan* "in defence of Oliver's title," and afterwards Clarendon repeated, as though it were meant seriously, Hobbes's jesting reply to the question of how he could publish such a doctrine—"The truth is I have a mind to go home." Not only was physical courage not possessed by Hobbes, but it was not even highly respected by him. With

reluctance he concedes it to be "a royal virtue," but "though it be necessary in such private men as shall be soldiers, yet for other men, the less they dare, the better it is both for the commonwealth and for themselves."

It was because of his low opinion of the generality—base, greedy, and quarrelsome—that Hobbes defended the principles of arbitrary governments, albeit the "trim commonwealth" he envisages, founded neither upon religion towards God nor justice towards men, was not likely to be pleasing either to priests or to presbyters. There can be no doubt that the philosopher judged human nature to be so degraded that only the strictest discipline could possibly serve its turn. He believed, however, that society was in no real danger, even in the most broken times, because its stability was established in the firm soil of self-interest. "Hobbes," Descartes curtly declared, "held all men to be wicked and gave them grounds for wickedness"; an attack that received a century later a just reprisal from Voltaire, who wrote of Descartes, "This best of mathematicians made only romances in philosophy. . . . It is given us to calculate, to weigh, to measure, to observe, this is natural philosophy; almost all the rest is chimera."

Hobbes was the son of one of the ignorant "Sir Johns" of Queen Elizabeth's time. The old vicar was a "good fellow," and it used to be said of him that he would doze in his church on Sundays only to

wake suddenly with the cry "Trafells (clubs) is troumps." Thomas Hobbes, because of his dark hair, was nicknamed "Crow" at school. From the first, he was independent in his ways. It was said he was utterly careless of the official curriculum at Oxford. He would go to the bookbinders' shops and for hours together "lie gaping on mappes." As private tutor to Lord Cavendish, son and heir of the Earl of Devonshire, he almost forgot his Latin, so much time did he spend in hunting and hawking with his high-spirited pupil. Indeed, his reading of the classics became confined to those brief intervals when his charge visited the jakes upon his natural occasions. The young nobleman was evidently a spendthrift, for Aubrey tells us that one of Hobbes's duties was to borrow money for him, and that he Hobbes—in performing this task "took cold, being wet in his feet (there were no hackney coaches to stand in the street), and trod both his shoes aside the same way." We may well believe that this especial employment required the greatest tact, and was even so a thankless one; for in after years Hobbes himself wrote the following wise words: "All men are by nature provided of notable multiplying glasses through which every little payment appeareth a great grievance." Hobbes served three generations of the Cavendish family, and grateful indeed must all lovers of "humane learning" be to this English house for sheltering the philosopher to his great old age. There were, it is true, certain

intervals in his life when Hobbes lived without the Devonshire patronage. For some time he was travelling tutor to the son of Sir Gervase Clifton, and until he was appointed mathematical tutor to the Prince of Wales he lived in Paris, occupied with "the meetings of learned men." Also on his return to England he seems to have taken lodgings for a time in Fetter Lane; but it was standing at the gate of the third Earl of Devonshire's London residence, Little Salisbury House, that he was recognized by Charles II as he drove through London at the time of the Restoration. This highly civilized monarch bared his head to the old Falstaffian monitor, calling him to his carriage door. Afterwards he gave him a pension of one hundred pounds, hung his portrait up in the royal closet, and let it be known that he should always be allowed free access to the palace. The King used to take pleasure in the old man's *bonhomie* wisdom, and on seeing his familiar figure enter the state rooms at Whitehall, would cry out, "Here comes the bear to be baited," pleasuring himself much to hear the young blades of fashion try to overreach the sagacious old man who would so often set the whole Court laughing with his dextrous repartees. There was a kind of childish innocence about Hobbes that must have been very disarming. He was capable of giving expression to the most outrageous views without seeming to anticipate the tumult they would be likely to arouse in limited minds. On his return

to Paris after the Battle of Worcester, Hobbes presented Charles with the copy of *Leviathan* "engrossed in vellum in a marvellous fair hand" still to be seen in the British Museum. The book had an ill reception. The attitude of the Church, with "its leg of gold and leg of an ass," may be somewhat recovered for us in the following extract from a contemporary letter:—

"All honest men here are very glad that the King hath at length banished from the court that father of atheists Mr. Hobbes, who, it is said, hath rendered all the Queen's Court, and very many of the D. of York's family atheists, and if he had been suffered, would have done his best to have likewise poisoned the King's court."

Charles, as usual, seems to have placated the popular feeling and reserved his own private opinion, which in this case was without doubt correct. He was often heard to say that "he never thought Mr. Hobbes meant to do him harm."

During his stay in Paris, Hobbes won the affection and respect of most of the learned men of Europe. Years afterwards, when he visited England, the Grand Duke of Tuscany took away his portrait and his books to be preserved in the Medicean library. Galileo was his friend, and Gassendi, and the celebrated Franciscan Friar, Marin Mersenne. Edmund Waller told Aubrey that he remembered meeting Descartes and Hobbes at the table of the

Marquis of Newcastle. It was about the time that Hobbes had the one serious illness of his life and was thought to be dying. Mersenne hastened to his bedside to assure him of the power of his Church to remit sins. "Father," Hobbes said, "I have long gone over that question in my own mind. You have something pleasanter to say. When did you see Gassendi?" Aubrey reports that other divines did not hesitate to press their way into his chamber. "Let me alone," the dying man is said to have exclaimed, "or else I will detect all your cheats from Aaron to yourselves."

"Here lies Tom Hobbes, the Bugbear of the Nation
Whose death hath frightened Atheism out of fashion."

After the Plague and Fire of London a wave of superstition spread over the country, and he who had been called the crow of Malmesbury became the scarecrow of England. A Bill was presented to Parliament for the suppression of Atheism and blasphemy, and a committee was instructed by the House of Commons to receive information about "Mr. Hobbes's *Leviathan*." Some of the Bishops made a motion to have "the good old gentleman burn't as a Heretique," and it was probably to the friendliness of the Home Secretary, Arlington, and to the good sense of the King, that Hobbes owed his immunity, rather than to his own investigations into the laws of heresy which culminated in an essay vigorously proving that it would be an act of grossest

illegality to commit him to the flames. "So fierce are men, for the most part, in dispute, when either their learning or power is debated, that they never think of their laws, but as soon as they are offended, they cry out, crucifige." A man who considered imagination nothing but "decaying sense" would naturally be suspected of other doctrines fundamentally subversive to the accepted theology of the times. Hobbes had always held the dangerous belief that "Evidence is to truth as the sap to the trees," and he was constantly put to his shifts to exonerate his works from the charge of Atheism. To him spirits had either to be corporeal or non-existent.

This was an article of his faith quickly seized upon by his opponents. Bishop Bramhall pressed him so tight that Hobbes was fain to cross to safe theological ground on a bridge of split hairs. He had once observed that the mixing of river water with mineral water had resulted in a substance indistinguishable from milk.

"If then such gross bodies have so great activity, what shall we think of spirits whose kinds be as many as there be kinds of liquor and activity greater? God therefore is not incorporeal but is only called so to indicate a mysterious essence that is 'something between infinitely subtile and nothing less subtile than infinitely subtile yet more subtile than a thought.'"

The contempt with which Hobbes regarded the

free-will notions of Bishop Bramhall and his other Arminian opponents is well shown by his remark, "Bramhall talks as if the will and the faculties were men or spirits in men's bellies." In controversies such as these he was well qualified to defend himself. "Words are wise men's counters; they do but reckon with them, they are the money of fools." As much, however, cannot be said of his adventures in the realms of mathematics.

"He was 40 years old before he looked on geometry; which happened accidentally. Being in a gentleman's library in . . . Euclid's elements lay open, and twas the 47 El libri 1. He read the proposition. 'By God,' sayd he, 'this is impossible!' So he read the demonstration of it, which referred him back to such a proposition; which proposition he read. That referred him back to another, which he also read. *Et sic deinceps*, that at last he was demonstratively convinced of the truth. This made him in love with geometry."

It was his belated passion for the "art diabolical" that led him to boast that he had squared the circle. He was unwise enough to insert a chapter in one of his books of first principles in which he made a show of his mathematical gifts. Immediately he found that the wooden horse was within the walls of his Troy town, and that his vaunting had involved him in his humiliating wrangle with the time-serving university turncoat geometrician, Dr. John Wallis of Oxford. Well might Dr. John Fell say that "for a

man to begin to study mathematics at forty years old 'tis as if one should at that age learn to play on the lute." But Hobbes, with the whole mathematical world against him, remained undaunted. He confessed that either he or they must be mad, but between two such alternatives the answer seemed to him clear as the day. For over twenty years the controversy raged, the Oxford Don punctually replying to each "Lesson for Oxford Professors" that Hobbes cared to deliver. It was not till the year 1676 that the quarrel closed with the unvanquishable veteran circle-squarer sending to the press at the age of ninety a work entitled *Decameron Physiologicum*. It is generally allowed that, in spite of demonstrable errors of the grossest kind, Hobbes showed that he possessed a remarkable grasp of the general theory of mathematical reasoning.

The last years of his life were spent in Derbyshire, at Chatsworth. The vigour of his body remained unimpaired. He continued to play tennis until he was nearly eighty. In the country, for want of a tennis court, he would walk "up hill and downe-hill in the parks, till he was in a great sweat, and then give the servant some money to rubbe him." His days were regular. He would rise at seven, take a little bread and butter, and meditate until ten. "He walked much and contemplated, and he had in the head of his staffe a pen and inke-horn, carried alwayes a note-book in his pocket, and as soon as a thought darted, he presently entered it into his

booke, or otherwise he might perhaps have lost it." He was suspicious of doctors, shy of medicines, and had his own theories on matters of health. "He was wont to say that he would rather have the advice, or take physique from an experienced old woman, that had been at many sick people's bed-sides, than from the learnedest but unexperienced physitian."

He calculated that he had been drunk one hundred times, which, as Aubrey comments, was not very often, considering his longevity. After reaching the grand climacteric he was very abstemious at the table, choosing fish rather than flesh, especially "whitings" if he could come by them. It was the custom of this grand old man, "brimfull of prodigious impieties," to sing himself to sleep with "prick songs," books of which he always kept in his chamber for the purpose. "He did beleeeve it did his lunges good, and conduced much to prolong his life." Possibly we may trace to this peculiar custom the rumour that he was afraid to lie alone at night because of ghosts, a rumour that he stoutly denied, characteristically declaring "that he was not afrayd of *sprights*, but afrayd of being knockt on the head for five or ten pounds, which rogues might think he had in his chamber."

He was six foot and over, and held himself to the end very upright. In the winter he dressed in a black velvet coat lined with fur, and always wore boots of Spanish leather "laced or tyed along the sides with black ribbons." The skin of his face was soft, "of that kind which my Lord Chancellor Bacon

in his *History of Life and Death* calles a goose-skin." He never affected to lock like a philosopher: "He desired not the reputation of his wisdom to be taken from the cutt of his beard." His whiskers, yellowish red in colour, were inclined to turn up—"a signe of a brisque witt." He was very bald, and yet within doors would always sit bareheaded and never catch cold, though he was often troubled to keep the "flies from pitching on the baldness." Till his dying day he spoke with a Wiltshire accent, and was obstinate to describe himself as Thomas Hobbes of Malmesbury. The Herald's office would have supplied him with a coat of arms, but he refused it—"The most worthy men have been rock't in mean cradles." At the age of eighty-six, "to take off my adversaries from showing their folly upon my more serious writings," he translated the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It is difficult to believe that the meeting between Hector and Andromache has ever been rendered into English with more grace:—

" Now Hector met her with their little boy
That in the nurse's arms was carried,
And like a star upon her bosom lay
His beautiful and shining golden head."

He would often say that he would "revisit in his dreams" those early happy days of his life when he first entered the service of the Devonshire household; but we are not without evidence that he never wholly relinquished his attachment to the present hour of his experience. Aubrey says in connection

with Hobbes, "It is not consistent with an harmonical soul to be a woman hater." We know that Hobbes left one natural daughter, whom he provided for in his will, and it is clear that even at ninety he remained susceptible to the charms of women, his hazel eye continuing to shine when delighted as if "it had a live bright coal in it." What little lady of fashion was it that came tripping between the quincunxes on the Chatsworth lawns bringing romance to the hours of the old pensioner, who, as long ago as Queen Elizabeth's reign, had "turned Euripde's Medea out of Greeke into Latin Iambiques"—a baggage of quality destined perhaps under a gilded candelabra in some Queen Anne dancing gallery to idle, frivolous and sedate, with patched flashing cheeks, after her lover? None knew better than the "great clerk," as his adversaries used sarcastically to call him, that no angels have ever existed "except those in petticoats," and how engaging it is to think that this love poem, so light and so living, came from the charmed imagination of so ancient a poet.

"Tho' I am now past ninety, and too old
T' expect preferment in the Court of Cupid
And many winters make mee ev'n so cold
I am become almost all over stupid.

Yet I can love and have a mistresse too,
As fair as can be and as wise as fair;
And yet not proud; nor anything will doe
To make me of her favour to despair.

To tell you who she is were very bold;
But if i' th' character your selfe you find
Thinke not the man a fool tho he be old
Who loves in body fair a fairer mind."

The summer of his ninety-third year arrives, and he informs his publisher that he is writing "somewhat to print in English." However, the stoutest oak tree of the forest must fall to the ground at the last. In November the Earl of Devonshire planned to move with his family to his Hardwick estate. Hobbes could not support the prospect of being left behind, and, sick though he was, his benevolent patron had a feather-bed placed in one of his coaches, and it was upon this truly Roman litter that the old man was carried towards the particular "hole" prepared for him by fate "to creep out of the world at." He died on December 4, 1679. "He was put into a woollen shroud." His coffin, covered with a white sheet and with a black hearse-cloth over all, was carried on men's shoulders "a little mile" to Hault Hucknall church. The mourners were very handsomely entertained with funeral bake-meats and wine "burned and raw." He was buried near to the third Earl's grandmother (Hobbes's first patroness), "close adjoining to the rail of the monument." These words are to be read in the inscription: *Vir probus et fama eruditionis forisque bene cognitus*. The exact resting-place of his bones is marked by a black marble slab—"the true philosopher's stone," as one of his witty friends wrote. He left in his will over a thousand pounds, which was more than expected, "considering his charity." He was a man esteemed by both rich and poor. They appreciated his company for his

“pleasant facetiousness” and good temper, and loved him for his “honesty” and for “the sweetness of his nature.” He was ever against “too hasty concluding,” and in appearance is said to have resembled his friend Galileo, the first great scientist—“both were chearfull and melancholique-sanguine; and both had a consimiltee of fate, to be hated and persecuted by the ecclesiastiques.”

Free men are justified in regarding Hobbes as a weather-worn signpost still able to indicate their correct road. “Reason is the pace; encrease of science the way, and the benefit of mankind the end.” No other English philosopher, not even Bacon himself, is more worthy of immortal remembrance than is this “great Columbus of the golden land of new philosophies.”

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